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Something shot over Mrs. Pearson's head, grazing her cap. It was only the monkey, but in her alarm she took it for something much more terrible.—
STORIES OF WHITMINSTER, p. 43.

(Frontispiece.)



STORIES OF WHITMINSTER.

BY

ASCOTT R. HOPE.

AUTHOR OF "GEORGE'S ENEMIES," "MY SCHOOLBOY FRIENDS," "STORIES OF
SCHOOL LIFE," "A BOOK ABOUT BOYS," ETC.



WILLIAM P. NIMMO,
LONDON AND EDINBURGH.

1877.

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EDINBURGH :
PRINTED BY M'FARLANE AND ERSKINE
(late Schenck & M'Farlane),
ST JAMES' SQUARE.

HAVE you forgot the nursery beds
On which we laid our curly heads,
And whispered stories, each to each,
My Brother !

Now Time has done its work for each,
In straightened locks and sobered speech,
And other lips now claim your love
As Husband !

All richest blessing crown your love
On earth below and heaven above ;
All joy be hers whom now I name,
My Sister !

May other boys soon bear our name,
And other curly heads, the same
As once were ours, crowd round your knee,
A Father !

And, as they come about your knee,
When tired of childish sport and glee,
Tell them these tales, and talk of me,
Their Uncle !

TATTERSHALL,
July 5, 1873.

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P R E F A C E.

I WOULD have my readers to understand that when the time drew near for sending this kite of mine into the air, I had meditated and partly written down the heads of certain somewhat serious observations which might serve for a tail, to steady it, as it were, and to explain to all who might be interested in the matter why I had written in such and such a strain, why I had fixed my scene in such a place, why I had touched upon this feature of schoolboy life and not on that, why I had laughed and not cried over one or the other folly; and how, whether I laughed or cried, I would not have written a line if my purpose had only been to raise thoughtless laughter. Then I had intended to give a hint

or two to the critics who should condescend to take notice of these apparently frivolous narratives, delicately suggesting the passages where they ought to admire, warning them off the features which I defy them to censure, thanking them for past encouragement and advice, and politely remonstrating with them in particulars where I think some of them may be led to see that they have treated me too cavalierly. In fact, my preface was to have been the most weighty and not the least remarkable portion of the present work. But when the day came that I was summoned to prepare it for the press, it happened that I was staying in the country with some friends, who, as is their wont, were singularly kind, and that the weather, as is not its wont, was singularly fine; and it was sweet to wander on the green banks of the full flowing Thames, and lie on the new-mown hay beneath the hawthorn shade, and dream of all things in heaven and earth except work or winter; and, in fact, it struck me that the public cared as little for reading prefaces as I for writing them, and that if my tales cannot make themselves understood, they do not

deserve any explanation of what was intended to be their purport; so I resolved to do without the proposed tail altogether, and to send up my kite at once, with only these few ornamental tags to it. If any of my schoolboy friends grudge the loss of the grave discourse with which I had wished to treat them, I must say that they are very hard on me, and I only hope that all of them are less idle than I am this hot weather. This very day I am going back to my desk, where, before I can get any further holidays, I have to write an imposition of nearly ten thousand lines, which must be shown up to my young masters next Christmas, and I am sure they will not be willing to let me off this new task; for if the present tales seem tame and uninteresting, as compared with much of the popular literature of the day, I can promise that no one shall have the same fault to find with the forthcoming work, with a view to which I have carefully studied the taste of the juvenile public, and shall do my best to gratify it in my new "CHRISTMAS ANNUAL," containing a large quantity of tomahawkings, shipwrecks, fights, ghosts,

grizzly bears, savages, escapes, and other wonderful adventures by flood and field, after the models of the most approved authors.

The following pages are very ordinary stories of ordinary boys at an ordinary school, and contain nothing but ordinary incidents and reflections, which, nevertheless, may be thought worthy of more than the ordinary attention bestowed on such matters.

But I have already explained that I am not going to write a long preface, so I will at once leave my readers to make the acquaintance of my stories for themselves, or at least will only pause to introduce them in the slightly altered words of an old poet—

“ Have me excused if I do not please ;

My will is good, and lo ! my tales are these.”

A. R. H.

THE FAVOURITE.

A



THE FAVOURITE.

I HAVE heard of schools to which boys return after the holidays without regret—nay, with delight—seeming to find home quite a dull place in comparison. Whether it be that these schools are different from the schools I have known, or that these boys are not the same as the sort of boys we used to be, I cannot tell; but I am sure we were not so fond of returning to Whitminster. Perhaps we had more work and less play there, not so much liberty, and not so great a choice of amusements; not such good food, or such abundant pocket-money, as the young Sybarites of the present day. At all events, when we used to assemble for the first time in the big, bare boys' room of our boarding-house, a collection of somewhat long faces would be

visible, and the boldest of us might perhaps have confessed to having shed just one or two little tears when saying good-bye that dismal morning.

I am speaking of the rule ; there were exceptions. The most common of these was the case of a little fellow coming to school for the first time, brimful of spirits and kindness, rejoicing in his emancipation from the nursery, and his admission into a paradise of freedom, of which he has heard such glowing accounts from companions who have themselves penetrated into the land of schoolboydom, and report it full of milk and honey, saying nothing about the gall and wormwood which in this part of the world also abound. He is eager to enjoy these privileges ; he can't understand how any one should be sorry to come back to school. He hungers for companionship, and does not doubt that all the other boys are as glad to see him as he is to see them. With amusing simplicity, he at once allies himself to the biggest and most formidable boys in the school ; he sports playfully round the den of Bruiser, that notorious bully, and hesitates not to address the great Augustus de Collars, who shaves twice a day, and has trousers constructed in London on the most scientific principles. Some of these oldsters, perhaps,

repulse his advances with more or less stiffness or indignation ; others, more good-natured, smile at the little fellow's innocence, and, with sage wags of the head, prophesy that he won't be so enthusiastic the next time he comes back to school. For my part, I am always touched by such frankness and trustfulness, knowing what chills will soon fall on the warm, young heart. And then one can't help thinking of the future day, when the same heart will have passed through its schoolboy trials, and, with the same hopefulness and confidence, will be going out into the great world, expecting to find there nothing but freedom and fun and friendliness, and learning in due time the bitter lesson of experience—what the real life of boy and man is in this great school of ours, where, for some threescore years or so at the most, we make shift to spell out our lessons, and are happy only if we can contrive to be ignorant, or for a little to forget how many heartless bullies and stern masters and hard tasks and cruel punishments we have to suffer as manfully as may be, hoping surely for the day when at length, for the last time, we shall quit our state of bondage and probation, and no longer be mocked by the names of love and liberty.

This is moralising something more than may seem fit; but when you come to think about it, there is a great deal to think about in a boy's first going to school. What I was going on to say was, that never did a new boy seem more cheerful and chatty than Harry Kennedy did the first day he made his appearance in the schoolhouse at Whitminster. He was not nine years old, and had never been to school before, but from the very first he took as kindly to it as a duck to the water. In his case, there was no trembling or wistful looking back to the cosy nest of the nursery; but, under the wing of his elder brother George, he trotted about, eager to see the school-room and the dormitories and the playground of which he had heard so much, and to make acquaintance with these wonderful boys to whom he was prepared to open all his honest little heart so fully. And the fellows took to him at once. George was decidedly a favourite among them, and this, of course, went far towards securing for his younger brother a more kindly reception than new boys generally meet with; but Harry needed no help of this sort as soon as it was seen what a merry and manly little chap he was. Some amusement was caused by his simplicity, but he was the first to join the laugh against

himself, though George, jealous of the family reputation, indignantly declared that in two or three weeks he would be more of a schoolboy than half the fellows who were making fun of him. So any one might have foretold who saw the sturdy urchin, with his light hair and frank blue eyes, laughing and chattering among a group of his new companions, without the least fear or shyness, yet without that boisterous swaggering manner which boys, and men too, often assume to conceal false shame. Even Mr Vialls, our master, was taken by his round happy face, and stopped to speak to him in quite a gentle tone of voice, though, as a rule, Mr Vialls was anything but a sucking-dove.

"So you are young Kennedy, are you?"

"Yes," said Harry, as bold as if he were talking to an ordinary mortal. "What is your name, please?"

"My name?" said the master, sitting down and taking Harry on his knee, while the other boys looked on wonderingly,—*"My name is Vialls."*

"Oh, Vialls! I've heard of you. You're the master who is so fond of licking the fellows, aren't you?"

The boys expected the ceiling to fall and crush this impious child, but Mr Vialls did not call for a thunderbolt, and said, quietly—

"You must call me Mr Vialls when you speak to me."

"All right, Mr Vialls! Do you know, you are very like the curate at our place?"

"Indeed!"

"Yes, you are. The other day he was going over a field behind Mr Burton's house, and the Burtons' bull ran at him, and he tumbled down, and they let Carlo our big dog out, and it made the bull run away. You can't think what a splendid fellow Carlo is! I suppose you never saw Carlo?" Harry rattled on. "He's black all over except his two front paws, and they are white; and papa says he has more sense than many men have; and oh! he's such a fine dog. I wish you could see him. You must come and see us in the holidays, and I'll show you Carlo. Why did you never come to see George in the holidays?"

"I am afraid he sees enough of me here," said Mr Vialls, putting the boy down and hastily walking away.

"I say, Harry, you mustn't go on with the masters that way," exclaimed George, as soon as he was out of hearing. "You must call him 'sir,' and not talk so free and easy to him. I never heard of such a thing! What a little donkey you are!"

But though George thought fit thus to rebuke Harry, he went about all the afternoon saying, quite proudly—

“Have you heard what my young brother said to Vialls?”

While pretending not to care much about it, he was delighted by the favourable impression the little fellow was making, and looked after him more carefully than he wished to show. Didn't he flare up presently when he found that Abbing had got hold of Harry as a promising subject to exercise his talents upon?

“You must go to the door of that room,” Abbing was saying; “be sure you knock at the right one. Then go in without waiting for an answer,—we always do,—and say, ‘Look here, Vialls; I've come for a pint-and-a-half of strap-oil.’ All the new fellows are bound to go and ask him for some, and you”——

“DROP THAT!” roared George, swooping down upon this confabulation. “I say, Abbing, if I catch you trying to humbug my brother, I'll give you a hiding that will make you howl for a month. So you had better not try it on.”

And Master Abbing thought it as well to acquiesce in this arrangement, and slunk off in search of some

other new fellow less adequately protected against his devices.

In due time came tea, and Harry confirmed the favourable impression he had already made on his new friends, by appearing with a large pot of jam under each arm. One of these he offered to the big boys, which these young gentlemen were pleased to accept with much graciousness; the other he distributed among his own contemporaries at the lower end of the table, and found all of them very anxious for the honour of his acquaintance. So liberally did he dispense the jam, that there was none left for himself; "But then, I've had lots to-day already," he explained to his next neighbour, who was none other than Abbing.

"Do you like butter?" asked Abbing.

"Yes. Do you?"

"Not much. I'll sell you mine for a penny a week, if you like."

"I'm much obliged to you; but George told me not to make any bargains without telling him," said sensible little Harry.

This silenced Abbing for the moment, but presently he returned to the charge again, and offered to eat an inch of tallow-candle if Harry would give him two-

pence. Receiving again a polite refusal to this proposition, he applied himself to his bread-and-jam. Then the boy on Harry's other side, by name Prior, as it seemed, attempted to take up the conversation.

"Have you seen my brother's watch?" he said, solemnly, as if he were speaking of an eighth wonder of the world.

"No," said Harry; "but George has a splendid watch at home, and he is to be allowed to bring it next term."

"Whose form are you to be in, young Kennedy?" somebody called out from the other side of the table.

"I don't know; but I'll ask George," quoth Harry.

"I say, don't stick to me so much, and don't be always talking about me," growled George to him more than once during the evening. "Go among the fellows of your own size, and you'll soon get on with them."

But though he gave this good advice, George was always coming to see how the youngster was doing; and if he did not do well, it certainly would not be for want of patronage.

No, indeed. For the next thing was, that Mrs Pearson sent to ask the two Kennedys to supper with her.

"My eye!" declared George; "I never heard of such a thing. I say, Harry, you are going to be a favourite with Mother P. I'm not. Whenever I go into her room she says my boots are dirty, and sends me to take them off. She never asked me to supper before!"

"I wish I hadn't eaten all that toffee," was the remark of Phillips, who had also been asked.

"There's a roast duck; Eliza told me," said Prior, with great seriousness. He hadn't been asked.

The boys who were fortunate enough to have received such an invitation washed their hands, brushed their hair, put on their best behaviour, and repaired to Mrs Pearson's parlour. But before they entered it, George suddenly caught his brother by the arm, and dragged him back to whisper into his ear—

"Look here! *Don't you kiss her, remember.*"

"All right! I know!" replied Harry, with much dignity.

Few boys entered this parlour without a certain amount of awe, such as humble individuals may be supposed to experience in the presence-chamber of a queen. Mrs Pearson, with her cap and curls, made a very imposing monarch, and received the homage of her subjects in such a way as not to encourage familiarity. But while George fidgeted uneasily on the

edge of his chair, and said, "Yes, ma'am," and "No, ma'am," and did not venture to eat as much as he should have liked to, Harry at once made himself as much at home here as he had done in the schoolroom. He played with the cat, and asked for more sugar to his tart, and told stories about Carlo, and laughed and chattered at such a rate that his big brother was lost in amazement at his audacity, and wondered if this was the Harry who wasn't allowed to go in the boat at home, and had to change his boots when they were wet, and mightn't even meddle with the pony unless somebody was by. The only person Harry showed the least fear for was Dr Pearson, the paralysed and superannuated Head-master of Whitminster, who silently dozed in his chair all the evening, and by his very presence cast a shade of awe over the liveliest disposition. But Mrs Pearson seemed far from displeased at the boy's familiarity, for when he said good-night, she patted him on the head, and gave him a handful of macaroons, and told him he must come to tea with her some night soon.

"I say, Harry, you must look out," said George, rather crossly, as they were coming away from this banquet. "You'll be becoming a regular favourite."

"Oh, no! I shan't," said Harry, understanding from

his tone that the character of "favourite" was an undesirable one.

Mrs Pearson, it will be known, with all her merits, had one fault—a rather serious fault in the eyes of some of her subjects, but one which was more than venial, if the opinion of others should be taken. She was too fond of taking an exclusive interest in certain boys, and treating them with more kindness than the rest—

‘ Some favoured two or three,
The little Crichtons of the hour
Her muffin-medals who devour,
And swill her prize—bohea.”

What with tea and supper and macaroons, and other miscellaneous refreshments partaken of at various periods during the day, one might think Harry had had enough to eat for that night. But he did not seem to think so, for he arrived in the dormitory with a goodly-sized cake in his hands, the sight of which immediately caused him to be surrounded by an admiring and appreciative circle.

“ Shall I lend you my knife ? ” said Prior, in a business-like tone.

Harry accepted this offer, cut up the cake, and distributed the whole of it on the spot, giving the largest

piece to young Davis, who was crying underneath the blankets and thinking of his mamma, from whom he had parted that day for the first time in his life.

So Harry's first day at school was a success, and he was not less liked the more the boys saw of him. Having been brought up among a family of brothers, he had none of the self-will and pettishness which new boys often find it so hard to get rid of, and his natural high spirits and cheerfulness had full play from the beginning. He soon got into the ways of his new life, after making a few mistakes of a kind that excited some good-humoured amusement, and were long remembered and repeated for the benefit of other new boys.

The first of these mistakes was when, on his first morning at school, he heard the boys calling out their places in the form, and thought they were telling their ages, though he wondered if Prior was really fourteen, and if Abbing, who called out "six," could be younger than himself. So, when his turn came, he jumped up and cried, "Eight and a quarter," and looked very knowing, and then was a little disconcerted to find that everybody was laughing at him.

"What a little stupid you were!" exclaimed George

when he heard of it ; for George did not like any member of the Kennedy family being laughed at.

“Well, how was I to know?” protested Harry, open-eyed.

“Oh ! you ought to have known,” said George, with true schoolboy logic. “Next time, remember, when they call your name, you have to give your mark in the form ; and when it’s the first thing in the morning, that’s calling the roll, and you must sing out ‘*Adsum.*’ Do you hear? And if any of the masters speaks to you, you must say ‘sir,’ and you must touch your hat to them. This morning, when you met Vials, I saw you grinning at him like a young baboon. You’ll know what to do next time.”

“I knew I ought to touch my hat, but I forgot,” declared Harry, fixing this good advice in his mind.

Now that very day he found an opportunity of putting it into practice, when he happened to come upon Mr Vials in the street. The master was talking to a gentleman, and had his back turned to Harry as he passed, so he did not notice the ceremonious salute which was made him. Harry didn’t know what to do then, but he decided on walking back and repeating his obeisance, and finding it still unnoticed, he walked round Mr Vials, taking off his cap in front

of him, to right and left of him, and finally, in despair, going behind again and giving him a poke in the back.

"Eh! what's the matter?" asked the master, turning abruptly round, and not looking very pleased at this mode of greeting on the part of a small boy.

"I wanted to touch my hat to you," said Harry, at length, performing the proper ceremony to his own satisfaction, and then cheerfully running away, and leaving Mr Vials lost in astonishment.

It was a long time before Harry heard the end of these two stories, and there was another which stuck to him still more closely. The master of his form—our old friend Paddy Williamson—was putting the small boys through their paces in reading and spelling, and in due course asked Harry to spell "kangaroo." Harry stopped fidgeting about on the form, bent all his small mind to the task, and got through it successfully; and then Mr Williamson asked him what a kangaroo was. Though he had been such a short time at school, he had imbibed a notion that it was illegal to ask another question of a boy who had just answered right, so he looked at the master as if in doubt whether he was being spoken to.

"Come, Kennedy! what is a kangaroo?"

"*Me*, sir?" said Harry.

B

"A very good answer," replied Mr Williamson, and all the boys laughed; and from that day frisky Harry Kennedy was known by no other name than "The Kangaroo," in spite of strong opposition on the part of George, who, in the end, found himself obliged to acquiesce in the title of "Kangaroo Primus."

Mr Williamson came to be just as fond of the young kangaroo as anybody, though the favour of that conscientious instructor was not very valuable, inasmuch as it was apt to show itself by extra attentions in the way of detentions and canings. So some of us used to think Mrs Pearson's patronage was better worth having, for the youngster who was fortunate enough to conciliate her esteem, came in for invitations to tea and supper, and promiscuous benefactions of cake, and all sorts of indulgences. Without being less merry and playful, Harry very soon learned not to be so free-and-easy in his dealings with persons in authority, and advanced proportionably in the good graces of our mistress. In the course of a week or two, he was quite as much at home in her parlour as he had ever been in the nursery; and as by great good luck he didn't break anything, and always treated Mrs Pearson with much natural

politeness, she wrote to his mother, pronouncing him to be the sweetest, dearest, best-behaved little fellow. Harry, for his part, liked Mrs Pearson well enough, though, to tell the truth, he would just as lief have spent his evenings in the big cold schoolroom, where the other small boys were romping about, as in the cosy warm parlour, where, if you did get cake and buttered toast, you had to sit very quiet, and not speak too loud for fear of awakening the old Doctor. And occasionally Harry had cause to wish that Mrs Pearson would not distinguish him by her special care ; as, for instance, when he was sallying out with some other boys, and the maid was sent after him to say that the grass was too wet, and that he was to come back and sit in the drawing-room with Mrs Pearson. Then Harry felt rather annoyed, and somewhat inclined to kick the good lady's shins as she took him on her lap, and wished with all his heart that she wasn't so fond of him, and envied the Priors, "those dreadful boys," who might go out in any amount of rain or mud without her minding it. But he soon got over his anger, and consoled himself by playing with the monkey. For Mrs Pearson, in spite of her dislike to "dreadful boys," actually kept a monkey in a gilt cage, that generally stood in the

parlour. She would not have been well pleased if she had known that the boys who were honoured by invitations to visit her were generally more interested in the monkey than in its mistress, but such was the truth. Lopez—that was his name—was a spiteful, restless-looking little imp, whose tricks were extremely amusing, and very mischievous too whenever he got a chance. Once a month or so he succeeded in escaping from his cage, and the whole household would turn out in pursuit, which, after lasting for half-an-hour, to the great delight of the small boys, would terminate in Lopez being brought back, scratching and squealing, to the arms of his mistress, who would scold and fondle him by turns, and behave very oddly for a respectable old lady of sixty, we thought. But I am growing ill-natured. Peace be with thee, Mrs Pearson, and thy foibles! And peace be with thee, Lopez! Thy fate was a sad one. A large pot of pea-soup—the custom always of a Wednesday forenoon—was on the fire; Lopez somehow or other got free; his curiosity carried him too far, and—I shudder to tell the rest. Enough that Lessing, our jester, was justified in saying that his end was *peas*. But it is not this tragic part that Lopez has to play in the present story.

Lopez was considered to exhibit a striking likeness to the youngest of the Priors, mentioned above, and he was very like his elder brothers, so you will have some idea of the characters who are next going to be introduced to you. There were three Priors, with about a year's difference in age between each of them, and they were known as Pry, Prior, and Primus. Mrs Pearson didn't approve of the Priors, who were rough-and-tough little fellows, not great cultivators of drawing-room graces, and for that reason perhaps more fit to shine in schoolboy society. Harry liked them very well, especially Pry and Prior, who were his companions in the small-boys' dormitory, or "cubs' den," at the bottom of the stairs, and had won his hearty admiration by such feats of courage and agility as are within the reach of a nine-year-old athlete.

Now Mrs Pearson, who kept away from the dormitories as a rule, sometimes paid these small boys a visit, to tuck up one of her favourites in bed, or administer a potion, or see that all was going on properly. And one night, hearing Harry cough, she was so concerned for him, that she manufactured a treacle posset, and took it to him when she thought he should have got into bed. But when she opened

the door, she was horrified to find her invalid engaged in a desperate pillow-fight with young Pry, while all the other fellows stood round in a ring, and were so engrossed in witnessing the combat, that they did not notice her entrance. She stood there with a frown on her brow, and the treacle posset in her hand, till she beheld her friend Harry laid prostrate by a well-directed blow from his antagonist, and Pry, flushed with triumph, looked up to see her indignant eye, as she rushed forward to interpose, and sent the little crowd flying off to their beds with looks of consternation and a little shame-faced laughing.

“Silence, boys!” said Mrs Pearson. “Is this a way for young gentlemen to behave in their bedroom?”

The young gentlemen were all undressing so fast, that they did not seem to care to answer the question, and Mrs Pearson, with rising wrath, addressed herself to young Prior.

“Aren’t you ashamed of bringing your rough, bullying tricks here? I wonder the others would stand by and let you ill-treat a new boy so abominably.”

Prior opened his mouth and said nothing. He was a better hand at pillow-fighting than at arguing, and for the moment he felt himself knocked over by this undeserved accusation. And Mrs Pearson herself

seemed to know that it wasn't exactly a case of bullying, for she addressed Harry in no very pleased tone.

"Get up and go to bed at once. I had brought a treacle posset for you, but it is quite cold now. If your cold is worse to-morrow, you stupid little boy, you will have yourself to thank for it. Go to bed all of you," she said, severely, as she went out of the room ; and then the sting of her speech came at the tail : "I shall speak to Mr Vials about this."

Even Harry, who had only been at school a fortnight, knew what that meant, and all of them began to speculate, with greater or lesser degrees of interest, upon what would be done to them to-morrow. And George and the eldest Prior, having heard Mrs Pearson's voice, stole in from their dormitory as soon as she was at a safe distance, and wanted to know what had happened. When George heard that Harry, at all events, was in for a scrape, if not all the boys in the room, he seemed neither concerned nor displeased that his younger brother was to suffer the common lot of juvenile humanity, but in a business-like way recommended him to rub a little onion-juice, if he could get any, on the palms of his hands, and then ran back to his own dormitory, upon a false alarm that the enemy was at hand.

The "cubs" made all haste to be safe in bed, in case of another visit from the authorities, and then went on wondering what would happen to them, and relating records and reminiscences of famous "rows" in days gone by, which these small boys thought appropriate to the occasion of their getting into such a serious scrape. The fate of Prior and Harry Kennedy was regarded as certain, and the latter was comforted by lively descriptions of the cane and its infliction, and stories of great stoicism exhibited by celebrated victims. He learned that it was no use trying on any dodges with Vialls, and that if you didn't submit quietly, you got it twice as bad in the end. Then it was told how, in the olden days, when there were giants among schoolboys, a certain fellow had refused to be thrashed by Dr Pearson, and, greatly daring, had snatched the cane from his very hands, and had smitten him over the sacred pate; apropos of which somebody mentioned, that big Soanso, that stupid fellow with whiskers at the bottom of the fourth form, had not hesitated to declare that Vialls daren't touch him. Moreover, a tradition was brought up that, among former generations of Whitminster boys, if a fellow had a flogging and didn't sing out, the other fellows in his dormitory

—in his form, held some authorities—were bound to subscribe a penny apiece as a reward for his fortitude ; so that a bad character and a thick skin must have put some boys in a fair way of realising a fortune. Prior was of opinion that the custom was a good one, and should be revived. Descending to less legendary times, eye-witnessess narrated how Henderson in the fifth form had stood a tremendous licking of twelve cuts from Vialls, and how, when it was over, he turned round and coolly asked if there wasn't any more. Harry thought this was the height of heroism, and hoped he should be handed down in history for some such noble deed. So he strengthened his heart, and resolved to play the man next morning, and fell asleep without troubling himself too much by visions of Mr Vialls.

Good-night, Harry ! and may the angels who give sweet sleep and forgetfulness to naughty little school-boys, watch over thy rest ! Would they might watch over thee thus for a lifetime, and guard thee from all fears and cares except those so easily forgotten, and from all sins but those for which the penalty can be so quickly and so bravely paid !

At this point in my story I fully expect that grown-up readers will begin to yawn, but all small boys will

be very anxious to hear what happened to our friends in the cubs' dormitory. Well, next morning they were summoned into Mr Vialls' room after breakfast, and Mr Vialls made them a speech about the naughtiness of not going to bed quietly, concluding thus—

“Mrs Pearson tells me, that last night two boys were having a pillow-fight. I must teach them that the rules are not to be broken with impunity. One of these boys, I am sorry to say, always appears as a ringleader in such scenes of disorder, and Mrs Pearson has asked me to punish him severely. Prior!”

Master Prior stood forward and received his caning, which he stood like a little man, not saying a single word, to the great satisfaction and edification of the rest of the dormitory, and also of Master Abbing, who was very fond of being present at scenes of this kind, except when he was called upon to play a too prominent part in them, and on this occasion had managed to introduce himself into the room, under pretence of asking Mr Vialls what was the postage of a letter to India.

The punishment was over, Prior had put his hands into his pocket, the spectators, relieved to find what their sole part in the proceedings was to be, were backing out of the door, and the master was locking

up the cane, when Harry, staying behind the rest, came up to him and said—

“Please, Mr Vialls, it was my fault too ; I was fighting too with Pry—I mean, Prior.”

“So I understood from Mrs Pearson,” said Mr Vialls. “But I hope that what you have seen will be enough to make you behave better for the future. As you are a new boy, Mrs Pearson has asked me not to punish you this time.”

So Harry followed the other boys, and wasn't quite sure whether he felt more glad or sorry at having got off so easily. Certainly what he had just seen of the cane did not dispose him to wish for its better acquaintance ; but now he saw the fellows gathering round Prior with the respect and admiration shown by small boys for a companion who has behaved well under such painful circumstances, and Harry felt that he himself had not played such a creditable part. As he was hanging back behind the rest, George ran to meet him, and ask how he had fared.

“Did you get it?” he inquired, with the anxiety becoming an affectionate elder brother.

“No,” said Harry, wishing now that he could have said, “Yes.”

"Why, you didn't sneak?" asked George, quite fiercely.

"No; Mrs Pearson said I was to get off," replied Harry.

George didn't look pleased at this, and said, sharply—

"You were just as bad as the other fellow."

"I know I was," said Harry, meekly submitting to his brother's reproaches.

But just then a diversion was made in the current of George's dissatisfaction. The smallest Prior, attended by his two brothers and a select circle of his partisans, appeared flushed with the triumph, such as it was, of having had a licking, and Master Primus advised himself to exult over George Kennedy.

"So your brother is a favourite, is he?"

"No, he isn't," said George, with great promptitude.

"Looks very like it," said Prior. "Fine thing to go sucking up to Mother P. and getting her to let you off your lickings."

"He didn't, I tell you," roared George.

"I shouldn't like to be a favourite!" exclaimed Pry; and then George fairly lost his temper at these aspersions on the credit of the Kennedy family.

"Will you shut up, or I'll give you something, young Pry."

"Who'll touch my brother?" demanded Primus.

"Well, then, why did he cheek me?" replied George, growing hotter as he found he had to deal with an adversary more worthy of his steel.

Poor Harry was quite ashamed of having caused all this to-do, and couldn't bear to see George fighting on his account, so he slipped away and made off into the playground, feeling very unhappy. Wandering along, he came to a little gate opening into the Pearsons' private garden. This was forbidden to most of the boys, but Harry, being a favourite, had been told he might go there as often as he pleased; so he turned into it, without thinking where he was going, and ran right into the arms of Mrs Pearson, who was there gathering apples, with Lopez, the monkey, fastened to her parasol by a chain.

When Harry saw her, he was for making off, but Mrs Pearson called to him, and he had to go up to her.

"I suppose you feel ashamed of yourself," she began, rather stiffly; and then, seeing that he hung his head, she spoke in a kinder tone. "Never mind,

Harry. I asked Mr Vialls not to punish you this time, and you won't be a naughty boy again, I dare-say. Sit down here and talk to me."

Harry sat down, but did not prove himself a very pleasant companion. All his lively, laughing ways were gone that morning, and Mrs Pearson settled in her own mind that he was very sorry for having been naughty, and tried to comfort him by giving him an apple.

"Would you like to stay away from school this morning and help me in the garden?" she said, patting him on the head.

"Oh, no, ma'am," replied Harry, awkwardly. "Mr Williamson would be angry."

"Not if I wrote him a note, little boy. But never mind; I am glad to see that you wish to stick to your lessons. Go off to school now, like a good boy; and as it is a half-holiday this afternoon, you shall go out with me, and have tea afterwards in the parlour."

Munching his apple, Harry returned to the playground, and there the first thing he saw was George, very red and hot, engaged in a most amicable game of prisoner's base with the whole Prior family, and about a dozen other boys. And as soon as Primus saw Harry and the apple, he cried out—

“Hallo! where did you get that? I suppose your friend Mother P. has been giving it you for telling tales of some of the other fellows.”

“I never tell tales,” says Harry, quite indignant; but Primus had run off without hearing his disclaimer, and the poor little fellow went down to school feeling as miserable as a healthy, honest boy of eight can feel.

One blessing is, that a boy of eight can scarcely feel miserable for long, and by dinner-time Harry had half forgotten about what had happened in the morning, and was as gay and cheery as ever. But as he was running up to join in a game, it was recalled to his mind by Pry, who hailed him with—

“Hallo! Here’s the favourite! I say, I wonder Mother P. lets you play, for fear of tumbling down and cracking your pretty crown. She ought to send the nurse with you whenever you go out, to see that you don’t dirty your dear little boots.”

Young Prior was only joking, and, as too many schoolboys do, not thinking of what he said; but Harry took him quite seriously. He turned away, and went all by himself into the schoolroom, and gave himself up to gloomy meditations. It was hard to feel that he was looked down upon by the other fellows as a

“favourite.” He did not doubt that it was wrong to be a favourite, but was it his fault? He didn’t want to get off being licked; and as for Mrs Pearson’s parlour, he would far rather be playing with the fellows in the schoolroom, so his conscience was clear. But they wouldn’t believe him, and Mrs Pearson would pet him and take him on her knee. How could he help it? The more he thought over his trouble, the less he could see how to get over it. Even George, though he had stood up for him against the Priors, seemed to think that it wasn’t right to be a favourite. He wished he could ask Mrs Pearson—no, that would never do. At length, as the only thing which he thought likely to be of any service to him, he resolved to write home and ask them to send him a cake. What he had already seen of school-life inclined him to think that this would be the best way of inducing the other boys to pardon his offence in being a favourite.

He had finished his letter, and was wondering if he might again venture to join the game of his companions, who, for their part, were all the while wondering why he was not with them; but just as he had sealed it, Mrs Pearson’s maid appeared, and announced that he had to be “made tidy” to go out with her mistress.

At half-past three in the afternoon, a good deal has to be done to make a schoolboy tidy, but Harry submitted to his fate with resignation, comforting himself by the thought that none of the fellows were there to laugh at his clean collar, Sunday gloves, and other due preparations for going into high society with Mrs Pearson.

Mrs Pearson's society was not very entertaining without the monkey, Harry thought, and of course the monkey was left at home. For they took their way through the most genteel and imposing streets of Whitminster, Mrs Pearson walking very slow, and Harry looking very demure, and feeling very ill at ease. When they got into the High Street, among the shop windows, that was better, but then Mrs Pearson must needs go into a dark, narrow linen-draper's shop, and Harry had to sit perched on a high stool by her side while she looked over ever so many things, and finally bought a parcel of silk, or calico, or worsted—what did he know about these things?—and gave them to him to carry. It was a relief to get into the open air again, but presently Mrs Pearson left the High Street, and walked up a sort of terrace by the river side, where there were twelve little houses all looking equally like large bandboxes. At the last

of these handboxes she rang the bell and inquired for the Misses Somebody, and now Harry had again to sit still for half an hour, this time in a drawing-room pervaded by an overpowering sense of neatness and propriety, while Mrs Pearson went through the ceremony of calling on the two Misses Somebody, who were no doubt most excellent people in their own way, but belonged to the class of old maids, between whom and schoolboys there is seldom much sympathy. As they entered the room, Mrs Pearson whispered to him to behave himself, and Harry behaved himself into a state of great discomfort. Of course he did not touch anything, and he did not like to go to the window to look out at the boats on the river, and durst not put his feet on the carpet for fear of dirtying it, and the elder Miss Somebody inquired if he liked school, and he said "Yes, ma'am ;" and the younger Miss Somebody asked him if he was a good boy, and, for a change, he said "No, ma'am ;" and then they said nothing more to him, and he didn't know what to do, and sat fidgeting on his chair and counting the flies on the window, and wondered what fun it could be for Mrs Pearson and these ladies to talk so much about the weather ; and he yawned and felt ashamed of himself, for he knew it wasn't good manners ;

and next he knocked over a jar with his elbow, and felt still more ashamed ; and for the rest of the visit, which seemed as if it were going to last for ever, he sat stiff and straight, looking very red, and thinking of the boys who were playing in the field, and wishing with all his heart that Mrs Pearson would go home. And merry little Harry began to feel as much like being in the sulks as it was possible for him to feel, and it did not raise his spirits even when the kind-hearted Misses Somebody brought out wine and biscuits, which was their only notion of entertaining schoolboys, and not a bad notion either, many boys would have thought. This visit, too, came to an end, but Harry's peace of mind was not restored. For as soon as they got into the street, Mrs Pearson would have it that he was tired, and insisted upon his giving her the parcel and taking her hand, and in this humiliating manner he was led home. Mr Vialls and the cane were better than this ; and whom should he meet but Charley Grey and Sydney Young and two or three other day-boys who had been playing with the fellows at the schoolhouse, and were going home, looking very dusty and untidy and happy. As soon as he came in sight of them, he tried to release his hand from Mrs Pearson's, but she held him fast, and there was nothing for it but

to walk straight on with his eyes bent on the ground, which, however, didn't prevent him from seeing the grins and winks of his companions. Harry felt angry enough to fight somebody.

At length they got to the schoolhouse, and there were a lot of fellows at the windows of the boys' room, laughing and pointing at him with their fingers. Harry looked the other way, but he knew very well that they were saying, "There goes the favourite!" and he would have given anything to have been able to make them believe that he did not wish to be a favourite, but a jolly fellow like George or Prior.

Mrs Pearson took him through the private door into her cosy parlour, and having made him sit down, she first scolded the monkey for trying to get out of his cage, and then asked Harry whether he would rather have damson or gooseberry jam for tea.

"None, thank you, ma'am," said Harry.

"What! aren't you hungry?"

"No. May I go to the boys, please? I think they want me."

"No, they don't, my dear, and you are too much of a nice little fellow to be always with them. You shall stay here all the evening—don't say no. I like having you here, Harry, so long as you are a good little

boy, and don't learn the rough ways of these Priors and creatures. Are you going to be good?"

"Yes, ma'am," mumbled Harry, not very enthusiastically.

"That's right. Well, if you won't choose, it shall be damson, and I'll go and get it now, if you don't mind waiting, my dear?"

And Mrs Pearson, much against his will, gave Harry a kiss, and then left him alone in the parlour while she went to fetch the jam.

Perhaps one ought not to have said that Harry was left alone in the parlour. Dr Pearson and Lopez were both there, but the tea-kettle singing on the hob was a more lively companion than either of them, for the old Doctor was fast asleep in his easy-chair, and the monkey was lying huddled up in his cage so quiet, that no one would have thought of noticing the mischievous look that twinkled out of his half-open eyes. Lopez was slyly watching Harry, and perhaps wondering what he was thinking of, and Harry was staring at the table laid out for tea, but not thinking of jam, or toast, or muffins.

What was Harry thinking of? Well, I believe he was thinking whether once in a way it might not be right to be naughty. What a thought for a well-

brought-up boy, as all the Kennedys were! Harry knew it was wrong to be naughty, but then he felt that it was wrong to be a favourite; and he was a favourite, because Mrs Pearson thought him so good, and he wasn't really so good as she thought, and he wanted to show her that he wasn't; and if he did something naughty, and made Mrs Pearson not favour him, it wouldn't be doing any harm to anybody; and George didn't like him to be a favourite, and surely his mamma wouldn't; and he didn't want to be very naughty, but only to be like the other boys; and—Harry got tired of his short flight in these regions of moral philosophy, and gave it up.

Of one thing he was sure, that he wished he had been caned like Prior, and could have gone to play among the other fellows with a clear conscience, and had not been asked to tea by Mrs Pearson. It was nice to have jam-and-cake, and because it was nice, surely it couldn't be wrong to wish not to have them. The question began to get puzzling again, but Harry held on to this: would it be wrong to do something which would make Mrs Pearson angry with him, and prevent her from petting him, and bring the other fellows to understand that he was not a favourite? The other fellows would think that he was quite right,

because they liked the Priors, and they didn't like favourites.

As soon as he thought of the other boys, he began to try the question by the laws of the schoolroom rather than of the nursery ; and from wondering if it would be right to do anything to gain the bad opinion of Mrs Pearson, unconsciously passed to considering what he should do with this intent. Abbing had told him to ask her where she bought her best wig, but he durst not go so far, and indeed he was too much of a little gentleman to be so rude. Then it struck him that if he were to poke the fire and make a mess all over the grate, Mrs Pearson would call him a "tiresome" boy, and resolve to have as little to do with him as with the Priors. But he did not like to move towards the fireplace for fear of awakening the old Doctor, the very look of whom inspired Harry with awe. Mrs Pearson would be very angry if he were to lie on the sofa in his dusty boots, but it was so clean that he hadn't the heart to dirty it. He might spill his tea on the tablecloth ; he had once before done so accidentally, and she threatened never to invite him to tea again if he was so clumsy. The very thing ! But no ; Harry felt that he would not have courage to go through with any plan of the sort,

unless he could get it over before she came back, and he expected her every minute.

As he was reflecting thus, Lopez began to wake up and jump about his cage, probably by way of hinting that it was about tea-time; for this genteel ape had bread-and-milk four times a day at his mistress' table, and ate it with a spoon a great deal more like a Christian than some of the other boarders who didn't have tails. And then a sudden thought came into Harry's mind.

"Why not let loose the monkey? Mrs Pearson would be so angry, and there would be the fun of catching it, and some of the other fellows would be called in to help, and then she wouldn't take him on her knee and kiss him as she did when they were alone, and"—

His hand was within two feet of the cage, Lopez looked so anxious to get free, and the door slipped back with tempting easiness; and somehow before he had quite made up his mind, there was the monkey jumping out and scrambling upon the table. The smashing of two cups and the slop-basin brought Harry at once to his senses.

"Come back, Lopez," he called out, in consternation. "Don't go there, now. Do come back!

Come along, old fellow !—tchick, tchick, tchick, tchicky.”

But Lopez was equally insensible to command, entreaty, and coaxing. With two bounds he sprung on the top of the bookcase, and jabbered out, as plain as a monkey can—“Don’t you wish you may catch me !”

Harry wished he could, and wished with all his heart he had never let the brute out. For now, as he drew back, and pretended not to be on the alert, Master Lopez comes swinging down from his fastness and gets on the table again, and Harry’s guilty heart trembled for the tea-cups. But he durst not interfere, and had to stand by in suspense, and watch the proceedings of the monkey, who luckily seemed inclined to behave with caution and propriety. Steering clear of the crockery, he reconnoitred the table, and at length fixed his regards on the cream-jug, into which he gravely dipped his tail and sucked the end of it with great relish. When Harry saw him do this several times, he couldn’t help laughing, and that alarmed Lopez, and sent him up the bookcase in half a second. Presently, however, he ventured to return, and devoted himself to the examination of a biscuit-box. Off this he carefully took the lid, and seizing a

biscuit in each paw, skipped up to the mantelpiece for more secure enjoyment of his prey. But just as he was beginning to munch, he suddenly turned round and caught sight of himself in the mirror, against which his tail was pressing uncomfortably. The effect was extremely ludicrous. He dropped the biscuits, shrank back, sat with pricked-up ears and open eyes for a moment, looked shyly round, turned sharply away again, moved towards the strange apparition, trembled, grinned, regarded himself with mingled doubt and delight, seemed uncertain whether to be more afraid of or pleased with this wonderful discovery. At length he became more assured, and it was comical to see him touch the glass with his paw and draw it quickly back, then rub his face, then throw himself into the most ridiculous attitudes and examine himself from various points of view, till, forgetting all about the delicacies of the tea-table, he was lost in the admiration of his own airs and graces, as far as he had room to exhibit them on the narrow ledge of the mantelpiece.

“Now is my chance,” thought Harry, and was creeping up behind him. But Mr Monkey was not such a fool as he looked. He saw Harry’s hand just in time, and was off with a bound. Down went a valuable

vase falling into Dr Pearson's lap ; flop came Lopez on his bald head. "Oh, dear !" cried the Doctor, waking up and ringing the bell. "Lopez !" shouted Harry, making a frantic rush at him, but not in time to prevent him from reaching the tea-table and making a swift career of devastation through the cups and saucers on his way to his bookcase fortress. Crash went the lamp, and "What's the matter ?" screamed Mrs Pearson, entering at that moment with a pot of jam in her hand, and getting just one glance at this scene of confusion before it was plunged in darkness.

Something shot over Mrs Pearson's head, grazing her cap. It was only the monkey, but in her alarm she took it for something much more terrible, and ran back into the passage, calling out for the servants, who were already hurrying up, summoned by the violent ringing of the parlour bell. They guessed what was the matter when they saw Lopez frisking about round their discomfited mistress, and when he saw them, he made off down the long passage leading to the boys' rooms.

"Catch him ! catch him, Eliza !" cried Mrs Pearson. "Nobody knows what mischief he may have done already."

"Never mind, mum ! He has gone among the young

gentlemen," said Eliza, as if to intimate that Lopez's career of victory would now be cut short enough, and Mrs Pearson understood that she was right, and returned to the parlour to see what had happened.

"What's the meaning of all this?" mumbled the Doctor, in no very good humour. "This is what comes of having boys about."

"It's only Lopez, my dear," said Mrs Pearson, taking a survey of the room by the light of a candle. "I declare he has broken a cup—two!—and spilt the cream on the clean cloth—and the lamp!—dear me!—and my beautiful vase!"

"Oh, mum!" cried Eliza and the other servant in sympathetic chorus.

Mrs Pearson's brow grew blacker as she discovered each fresh disaster, and when her eye rested on Harry, who was cowering in a corner of the room, she saw conscious guilt on his face, and burst out—

"You naughty, bad, careless, ungrateful boy! You let him loose, and allowed him to do all this mischief. I declare you shall pay for it all out of your own pocket-money, every penny. Go away from my room this very moment, you stupid fellow! You are not fit to be left alone anywhere but in a schoolroom

or a stable. It will be a long while before I ask you to my parlour again. Oh! you bad child!"

Long before Mrs Pearson was out of breath, Harry had fled, and at the door of the schoolroom he met a party of boys carrying Lopez in triumph.

"How did he get loose?"

"I let him out, and she says she won't ask me to tea any more," said Harry, looking round quite proudly.

"What a stupid fellow you were to throw away your chance!" was Prior's opinion; and this seemed strange to Harry after what he had heard said about favourites.

But he was too excited to think about it. A dozen times over he told the boys what he had done, and mistook their expressions of wonder for admiration. He romped and ran about in the highest spirits; he was idle and troublesome at preparation, and got an hour's detention from Mr Vials. If it had been a caning, I think he would have been rather pleased than otherwise at such an opportunity of showing that he was not a favourite.

The first thing that cast a damp upon his self-satisfaction was George's reception of the great news. George had been out at tea with Mr Williamson, and

when he came in and heard what his younger brother had been about, he only said, "What a little stupid you were!" Whereas Harry had expected to be praised to the sky for his courage and proper school-boyishness, if I may invent a name for a virtue which has a real enough existence.

This first made him think that what he had done was, after all, not such a very fine thing; and when he was in bed, and was able to reflect over it more coolly, he began to repent. It was naughty of him to let loose the monkey, and break all these things, and frighten Dr Pearson, and make Mrs Pearson angry, and give so much trouble to everybody. He felt that he had done wrong; and Harry, with all his mirthfulness, had been brought up to understand what was meant by doing wrong.

But what was he to do now? Here Harry's conscience did not urge him to do anything in particular. He supposed that he would be punished, and that in his eyes was confession, penance, and absolution. He wished he had not let out the monkey, and he hoped the consequences would come and be gone as quickly and pleasantly as possible. What more practical penitence could you have in a boy of nine?

But no one proposed to punish him. Mrs Pearson

took no notice of him—that was all. Mr Vials, the dread minister of justice, said not a word about his misconduct—at least, not till Friday evening, when he was administering to his flock their customary pocket-money in small doses, and stopped for a moment over Harry Kennedy's threepence.

"Mrs Pearson thought of stopping your pocket-money this week, on account of your carelessness the other evening; but though she is very much displeased with you, she doesn't wish you to be punished, and you can have your threepence as usual."

Harry walked away without saying anything; and a few minutes afterwards, Mrs Pearson, who was sitting with two or three friends at supper in her parlour, was interrupted in a conversation about the character of their respective maid-servants by two taps at the door, the first one timidly low, the second, clumsily loud.

"'Min!" cried Mrs Pearson, who was so accustomed to pronouncing this formula, that it had got contracted in her mouth to a single syllable.

And in walks Harry, and goes up to his mistress, and lays down before her his threepenny-piece, new, shining, precious.

"What's this for?"

"The things Lopez broke," he came out with, in a

voice that seemed to show that he couldn't trust himself to say much.

"My dear child!" said Mrs Pearson, "I didn't intend that you should pay for them. I know I was vexed at the time, and no wonder; but, after all, it was an accident, and the best thing to do is to say nothing more about it. I am sure you didn't let the monkey out on purpose, and next time you will be more careful. Here!" and she held out to him, not his threepence, but a sixpence which she had substituted for it.

But Harry shrunk back, and his face grew red, and his eyes filled with tears, and he stammered out—

"But—I did—do it—on purpose. I'm very sorry. I'll never do it again."

"What!" cried Mrs Pearson; but at this point Harry ran out of the room, and left her lost in astonishment mingled with disgust.

"Did you ever know such strange creatures as boys!" she exclaimed to her friends. "This child won't tell a lie, but he thinks nothing of letting the monkey loose on my tea-table, just for the fun of seeing it break my cups and saucers. And after all my kindness to him, too! Well, well! I thought he was a nice little fellow, but I am afraid he is no better than the rest of them, after all."

THE BURGLAR.

11



THE BURGLAR.

THE venerable Bishop of Oudenham is almost universally admitted to be among the most amiable and excellent of prelates, but there was one passage of his long and useful life which gave rise to feelings of extreme disgust and disapproval among a certain section of the community, to wit, the boys of Whitminster School. I refer to the occasion on which his Lordship was requested to distribute the prizes at the Midsummer breaking-up of this school : many old Whitminster boys will remember the year very well. The Bishop replied that he would be most happy to preside, but that his engagements on the day specified would not permit him to come sooner than two o'clock ; so, to suit his convenience, the prize-giving was fixed to take place in the afternoon,

much to our discontent. I fear we did not sufficiently appreciate the honour which his Lordship proposed to confer on us; but we were fully sensible of the inconvenience of impatiently waiting all the forenoon—when our breakings-up had hitherto been wont to take place—and then rushing off to catch the last trains which could take us home, *not* in time for dinner at our parents' houses, as greedy boys feelingly remarked. And if most of the fellows had reason to be discontented, two of us had to bemoan a still harder case. These two were Phillips, commonly called Jemima Anne, and myself, known as—well, my name can be of no use to the reader, who can fill up the blank with N. or M. as the case may be. I was going to stay for a week at Phillips' home, and the trains had been so stupidly arranged that it was impossible for us, starting in the afternoon, to get there the same evening. As neither of us had much prospect of a prize, we had sounded the authorities about getting away in the morning without waiting for the ceremony; but it wasn't to be heard of, and we found ourselves condemned to stay at school till the next day. Perhaps the Bishop was a boy himself once, and knew what it was to be eager about going home. If he could only have learned the disappointment that

he had unintentionally caused us, I am sure he would have consented to come and give away the prizes at six in the morning, rather than keep one boy, much less two, at school an hour after they need be. But either he had never been a boy, or he had forgotten about it, or he was not informed of the unfortunate position in which Phillips and I were placed ; so we had to resign ourselves to our fate, and the story that I am going to tell came to be told. It is about a burglar, and the reader may be surprised to find me beginning with a bishop, but he must read on and see how clever we authors are. And while I am talking about bishops, let me mention that I have a book which once belonged to a real, live bishop,—not the Bishop of Oudenham, but a still more learned and dignified one, who was educated at the same school as myself. Never mind how it came into my possession ; it is a tattered old Cornelius Nepos, that has evidently suffered many things, and is sadly marked with ink-stains and dog-ears. These may or may not have been his Lordship's doing, but what nobody can deny is that, scrawled on the fly-leaf in a handwriting recognisable by all collectors of episcopal autographs, may be read this line—“ *Three weeks to the holidays ! Hurrah !*”

Well, the weeks, and the days, and the hours passed over our heads more and more slowly, as we wanted them to go faster and faster. Old Father Time seems to take a pleasure in tormenting school-boys, of whose youthful health and strength he is no doubt envious. When the holidays have begun, he smartens his pace, and his old legs step out with quite a malicious liveliness ; but when they are coming on, he pretends to have grown stiff, and lumbers along as lazily as if he were dragging six millions of years at his heels. And the schoolboy, in return, does not like the old gentleman, and resorts to all kinds of devices to trick him. I speak things known. What says the poet ?—

“The indented stick, that loses day by day
Notch after notch, till all are smoothed away,
Bears witness, long ere his dismissal come,
With what intense desire he wants his home.”

At the time I speak of, I considered myself too big for the notched-stick business ; but I was not above having a calendar on the last leaf of my Latin Grammar, where every day for a month I joyfully marked off a space. The last square in this calendar was filled up, and the eventful morning had dawned bright and balmy, and the forenoon had passed away some-

how or other, and here we were at length—closely packed together in the great schoolroom and in our best clothes, looking to the dais where sat our masters and certain “potent, grave, and reverend seigniors” of the neighbourhood, while a crowd of admiring friends and relations filled every corner of the room, and showed their interest in us by doing their best to suffocate us. The repetitions had been gone through; the prizes had been given away; we had made ourselves hoarse with cheering. The Bishop had performed his function well, and done much to reconcile us with his late appearance. With each prize he had said something appropriate and sensible; now and then he had made a little joke, which of course produced roars of laughter; for it is as surprising, and therefore pleasing, to hear even a bad joke from a bishop, as it is to see a horse ringing a bell or firing a pistol. We were inclined to think most favourably of his Lordship, so kind and genial did he show himself; but we were not so well pleased when he began a long and earnest and wise speech, complimenting the boys who had got prizes, encouraging those who had not, and giving good advice to all. It was a good speech, and we ought to have listened, but I fear it was partly thrown away upon us, for too many boys were

thinking of the railway time-tables, and there were uneasy glances at watches, and the applause was not so loud or hearty as before. At last came the Bishop's peroration, which completely won the hearts of the Whitminster boys.

"I have many more things which I should like to say to you, but a little bird has whispered to me that you think I have said enough—(*slight cheering and feeble cries of "No, No!"*)—and I know that boys who are going to start for home in half an hour make very bad listeners. So I will only say one thing more, and that is, I hope you will all be good boys, and enjoy very happy holidays, till the 8th of August, when—I grieve to say—my friend the head-master requires your presence here once more to attack the old enemies or friends, which, I suppose, will be shut up in these desks till that sad day arrives."

Never did any burst of ancient or modern eloquence call forth such enthusiasm. Never surely did the old roof hear such cheers as rung out from our throats—for the Bishop, for the masters, for the ladies, for the holidays. Never did such happy boys stream out of the dusty schoolroom and hurry off—home! What a world of joy is in this little word, or once was! Ah, me! we cannot believe that such happiness still

exists upon earth ; we look wistfully back to the storehouse of boyish delights, of which it seems as if the key had been lost because it is no longer in our hands ; we forget to thank Heaven that little Dick and Tom and Harry are now revelling in these same joys that were so bounteously showered on the threshold of our own lives.

And now all was bustle among the boys. Some rushed off to their boarding-houses to complete their preparations ; others made straight for the station, either to start at once, or to see some friend off. Every omnibus in Whitminster was of course pressed into our service that afternoon. One or two of our head boys had cabs waiting for them at the school-gates, and it was whispered among us admiring youngsters, that these were to carry away the loads of prizes, though they were already pretty well filled with boxes and bags. Nearly all the fellows at our house had their things wheeled down on a truck by Macduff, the gardener, who on such an occasion was always assisted by Uncle Ned. I should like to be able to tell you all about Uncle Ned, and how he came to be connected with the Grammar-school. But all I have time to tell you is, that he was a negro—a runaway slave, according to his own account—who had come

to Whitminster as a clergyman's servant, and since his master's death had lived there on a small pension and what he could pick up by odd jobs of fetching and carrying. Uncle Ned, for reasons which I may explain some day, took a very lively interest in us, and never was there a breaking-up without his making himself very busy in our service, and of course receiving enough coppers and sixpences to make him a rich man for the next fortnight. So there he was at the station, rushing about, dragging along boxes, howling to the porters, shoving the boys into carriages, and making himself so conspicuous that every one turned to look at him. He was a queer figure, Uncle Ned, at the best of times, and when he was worked up to a state of excitement, as upon such occasions, his black face seemed to glisten, and his eyes rolled comically enough to make a crow laugh, and his few scanty wisps of stubbly hair stood up more obstinately than ever. It was not only from age that Uncle Ned had so little hair on the top of his head, where, we are informed upon the authority of the poet, "the hair ought to grow." It was a common joke among us young rascals to ask him for a lock of his hair, and as he always took this request seriously, and seemed greatly flattered by it, I fear we were to blame for

the unfurnished state of his pate. He seldom wore any covering on his head on week-days, and looked very funny. But he looked still funnier on Sundays, when he always mounted an enormous white hat and a preternaturally long black coat, and went to church with great pomp and solemnity.

It was fine to see him running by the side of the train to the very end of the platform, grinning as only a negro can grin, and waving his great black paw to his special friends among the boys. But *they* were not quite so friendly, for out through the window would come a bright tin tube, and a volley of split peas would rattle in the old fellow's face, making him utter a roar and come to a halt. Then there would be a great burst of laughter from the train, or another discharge of peas, or perhaps the naughty boys would suddenly be silent and shrink back in the carriage as they caught the eye of Mr Vialls, or one of the other masters, fixed upon them. Then, as likely as not, Ned would begin to console himself by counting up the money he had received ; and Mr Vialls went up to him and said—

“Now, Edward, my good fellow, don't you go and make a fool of yourself with that money.”

“Oh no, massa !” exclaimed Ned ; “I'm going to put him all in de Savings Bank.”

"I'm glad to hear it ; because somebody has told me that somebody else, when he gets a little money, is rather too fond of putting it in the public-house."

"Oh no, massa ! that's not me," declared Ned, with such an air of seriousness and dignity that Phillips and I, who were close by, nearly burst out laughing before the master's face.

"I am glad to hear it," repeated Mr Vials, in a not very confident tone ; and Ned tied all his money up in a ragged red handkerchief, and announced loudly that he was going off to the Savings Bank that very moment.

His services were no longer required, for the last train had gone away, and not a boy was left on the platform, except Phillips and myself. As we strolled away from the station arm-in-arm, we agreed that after all our lot was not so hard. There was something novel and entertaining in the idea of having all the house to ourselves, and being monarchs for one night of whatever we might feel inclined to survey. Then, school-time being over, we settled in our own minds that the ordinary rules of discipline should be suspended, and were minded to prove our freedom by not going home to tea, and by scorning the barbarous institution of lock-up. Moreover, we

had one source of comfort which Mr Vialls knew not of, and it was well for us that he did not. Other boys had vexed his soul by equipping themselves for the journey home with pea-shooters and catapults, according to immemorial custom ; but, despising these childish weapons, we——

What did we do? Why, we walked out of the town and through the fields till we came to a secluded spot. There we paused, consulted, looked round us cautiously, peeped through the hedges, and finally Phillips produced from his pocket a very small shining six-barrelled breach-loading revolver, and a box of cartridges. After gazing on this with admiration not unmingled with awe, we proceeded to load the piece ; that is, Phillips, holding it very gingerly, undertook to put the cartridges in, while I looked on and gave advice. As soon as the loading was accomplished, I suggested that it should be cocked. Cocked it was accordingly, but not without risk, for, to Phillips' alarm and horror, all the barrels suddenly went off one after another, luckily without doing any harm. This so alarmed us, that we hurriedly decamped as soon as the pistol had stopped exploding, not because Phillips had taken away his finger from the trigger but for another reason. Nor did we halt,

and again bring our artillery into action till we had put at least three fields between ourselves and the echoes of the first discharge. Then we loaded again, this time with double caution and greater success, and Phillips, as proprietor of the weapon, having put aside a claim that it was my turn to fire, set about selecting an aim. He was not long in perceiving a rook leisurely feeding about fifty yards off, and proceeded to open fire without delay. Whether the old rook was deaf, or blind, or rash, or uncommonly shrewd, I know not, but he calmly went on with his supper till my companion had let off the whole six barrels at him, and only then quietly flapped his wings and proceeded upon his journey in a leisurely and genteel manner, leaving us with a single caw of contempt.

This was rather a damper to Phillips, and he was more willing to give me the pistol and let me have my turn. I loaded and looked about me, feeling determined to distinguish myself as a marksman, and put "Jemima" to shame; but just as I had spied a very respectable old blackbird taking the air in front of his nest in an elm-tree, Phillips nudged my arm and cried—

"Look out!"

There was Mr Bentley, one of our masters, walking



On the first day after our arrival, we should go to a cave about three miles from his father's house. There we were to play at being smugglers.—STORIES OF WHITMINSTER, p. 63.

towards us from the other end of the field. I quickly popped the pistol into my pocket, and we each assumed an air of unconcern. When Mr Bentley came up to us, he remarked that it was a fine evening, in the most friendly manner in the world, but it appeared to me as if he cast a very suspicious glance at my jacket-pocket, and Phillips seemed to have similar misgivings, for as soon as the master was out of sight, he proposed that we should give up our sport for the present. I agreed, and we took the cartridges out, and then took our way to the schoolhouse, promising ourselves lots of shooting when we arrived at Phillips' place, where there were no masters and lots of room by the seaside for any amount of ball practice, so my friend gave me to understand. Phillips was of an imaginative turn of mind, and he held forth with great enthusiasm upon the adventures to which we should treat ourselves. On the first day after our arrival, we should go to a cave about three miles from his father's house. There we were to play at being smugglers. Phillips was to lie on his arms within, and I was to keep watch outside, and in due time to give notice of the approach of the coastguard-men, when Phillips, as captain of the gang, was to sally forth and commence firing, and a bloody combat with nobody

was to take place, and result in his complete discomfiture. Another day we were to go out in a boat and try to get a shot at a gull, and to be chased by pirates in the course of the voyage. These diversions were to be varied by a grisly-bear-hunt among the sand-hills, the part of grisly bear being, for this once only, omitted through circumstances beyond our control.

Arranging our amusements thus, we reached the schoolhouse, and found an unusual silence reigning in what, for three months, had been a busy and noisy hive of young bees or drones, improving or enjoying the shining hour as the case might be. Mrs Pearson, and Mr Vialls, the house-master, had gone out to a party, we were told ; but the matron was in her room, quite worn out by her exertions in packing and otherwise preparing for the holidays. If we could have understood how weary good old Mother Bramble felt, I don't think we should have bothered her so much ; but the fact was that we would give her no peace till she promised to let us have roast potatoes for supper. While these were preparing, we took a stroll over the house, and rejoiced in the unwonted sense of having it all to ourselves, without rulers or rules to interfere with us. We wandered through the dormitories, still in confusion after the packing, and

the desolate-looking schoolroom and dining-hall, that always seemed cheerful enough when filled with young, merry faces, and the lavatories and lobbies strewn with old shoes, bits of rope, broken stumps, and other signs that a juvenile army had just broken up its encampment. We turned on the water at all the taps, and turned out the boys' lockers to see if anybody had left anything behind, and turned about in search of any moderately mischievous occupation that might come handy. We next went out into the playground and took a kindly look of farewell at the old fives-court and the gymnastic bars, and the quiet little corners where fellows used to make bargains and talk secrets. Finally, in our elated frame of mind, we even dared to penetrate into the Chamber of Horrors, the gloomy cavern of despair ; I mean, we stole on tiptoe into Mr Vialls' room, and, with respectful eyes and cautious hands, rummaged about, and tried on the master's gown, and looked for his cane, only, of course, he had locked it up ; and enjoyed the stolen pleasure of a near inspection of a place which, in school-time, we too often had visited upon business of such a nature as to interfere with our powers of calm observation. Standing there, in the enemy's stronghold as it were, under such new and unfamiliar

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circumstances, we realised more vividly than before that the holidays had indeed begun.

“Juvat ire et Dorica castra
Desertosque videre locos litusque relictum.
Classibus hic locus, hic acie certare solebant.”

Even thus, with bated breath, we pointed out to each other the fatal spot where you stood when you had to get a thrashing, and the cupboard in whose dark and mysterious recesses dwelt the dread ministers of justice, and the book in which your name went down for detention or an imposition, and the window which George Kennedy had cracked with a stone one day, and Mr Vialls had never found it out yet. Such is life!

When we had prowled about to our hearts' content, we remembered the roast potatoes, and returned to the matron's room to see that she fulfilled her promise. She kept it like a man, and we made a good supper, and sat chatting in her room till past ten, when she went to bed, and we condescended to think we might do likewise without any discredit to our new-fledged independence.

We chose out two corner-beds in the largest dormitory, and disposed ourselves to rest. But Phillips

must needs load his revolver and put it under his pillow, for, as he informed me, his uncle in Ireland never slept without a loaded pistol. This set him off into a series of anecdotes and legends connected with his family, from which I learned that Phillips' ancestors were a singularly uncomfortable and unfortunate set of people, who were addicted to murdering and being murdered, and appearing after death in white sheets to all sorts of honest and innocent people, and making strange vows and hearing strange noises and doing strange actions. His father's house, he gave me to understand, had in its time been a perfect Castle of Otranto for mystery; but it was comforting to learn that at present no ghosts were kept on the premises; the last of them had disappeared when a railway was made near the building. Still I was rendered rather uneasy by this kind of talk, and begged Phillips to remember that ghost stories were only seasonable at Christmas-time. Then he entered upon an interesting narrative concerning an old servant of his grandfather's, who was killed by robbers, and hidden away in a beer-barrel, where his skeleton was unfortunately discovered some years afterwards. To this style I also objected; so he said he would tell a story of a more lively kind; and,

leaving the gloomy records of his family history, began to give me a tale out of his own head, as he was pleased to call it. It was about a wicked old uncle who wanted to seize the inheritance of two innocent young nephews, and to that end secured the services of two desperate characters with masks on their faces and long swords by their sides, who led the children into a deep wood, and were about to kill them, when a brave and handsome knight made his appearance, and——

At this point I interrupted him, by suggesting that I had heard something like this before; but Phillips indignantly denied the charge of plagiarism, and assured me that his story would end quite differently from the "Babes in the Wood." While we were disputing this matter, our attention was attracted by a noise outside. We listened, and heard a heavy footstep on the newly-laid gravel beneath our window.

"Who's that?" asked I, in surprise.

"I don't know, but we'll see," replied Phillips, getting up and going to the window, which was already open.

But we could see nothing, so dark was the night. We could hear plainly enough, however, that there

was some one beneath, where no one had any business to be, and both of us were a little startled.

"Who's there?" challenged Phillips.

There was no answer, but we heard sounds beneath which showed us that our unexpected visitor was trying to remove the bars of one of the ground-floor windows.

"I say! it's a robber," exclaimed Phillips, in a loud whisper. "What shall we do? He's trying to get into the house, and there's no one at home but Mrs Bramble and the servants."

"Run and wake them up," I suggested, feeling quite as much alarmed.

"All right—stop! it's no use. The door at the bottom of the stairs is locked, and we should have to howl for half-an-hour before any one would hear. What shall we do? Oh, I say! he'll get inside in another minute! He's filing at the bars!"

"No, he's not. He is trying the door now, I think."

"I say! go away!" cried Phillips, loudly. "I have sent a messenger for four policemen, and they will be here directly." Then dropping his voice, he again whispered to me, "What shall we do?"

"The pistol!"

"I forgot all about it. Here it is. Shall we--will you fire?"

"No—you. Try to frighten him first, but look sharp."

By this time Phillips had begun to understand that he was in possession of a splendid opportunity for playing the hero, so advancing to the window, he addressed our assailant with great firmness—

"You had better go away. Help is at hand, and we have three loaded revolvers here. Leave the door alone, villain!"

A strange sound, like a low chuckle, was heard in answer to this address; then the robber seemed to be moving about on the gravel, and suddenly a number of small stones were thrown up at the window. Thereupon Phillips drew the trigger, and the silence of the night was stirred by a sharp report. He paused for a minute, as if frightened by the sound, and then fired again several times.

By the red flashes of the pistol we thought we saw the robber staggering about as if he was wounded; but the fact is, we were both so excited, that I am not sure if I know exactly what now took place. Of course the alarm soon spread; we heard shouts and footsteps from the road; a window was flung up in the servants' part of the schoolhouse, and Mrs Bramble's well-known voice was heard shouting forth,

"Thieves! murder! police!" and other sentiments appropriate to the occasion.

"I believe he is down—no he isn't—I see him there—there's two more of them behind the tree. Load again—load it quick!" cried Phillips, handing me the pistol with trembling hands.

I hastened to do as he told me, though in my hurry and alarm I think I put in two or three of the exploded cartridges, and all the while Phillips kept crying out, "Quick, quick!" as he eagerly peered out into the darkness.

"They are coming again! Give it me, whether all the barrels are loaded or not;" and he snatched the pistol from my hands and again fired it as often as it would go off, with an accompaniment of redoubled shrieks from the servants and Mrs Bramble. But in vain; the robber or robbers seemed to advance with undaunted courage, and we heard that a vigorous effort was being made to burst in the door.

"He'll get at us in a minute," cried Phillips, himself essaying to load, but in his agitation first upsetting the box of cartridges, and then letting the pistol drop on the floor, where it went off, and the bullet whizzed close to my naked leg. This was too much for me. Exclaiming that the burglars had got into the house,

and were coming up the stairs, I was for bolting out of the room ; but Phillips, pale and determined, stood his ground like a man, and called out to me to stay, for the police were coming.

Help was really at hand now. The voices and footsteps came quite close, and we saw the welcome flash of a bull's-eye, and took courage.

"This way!" shouted Phillips. "Don't let them escape! Hold them tight! Down beneath the window here! You're just in time! Seize them!" And each sentence of this address was punctuated by a scream from Mrs Bramble, coming in at intervals.

"Shall we go down and help them?" proposed Phillips, boldly putting on his trousers and shoes, and I made haste to follow his example.

We ran down-stairs, and found that the key had been left in the door of the boys' entrance, so in one moment we were standing outside, where we found quite a small crowd assembled. Some were running about in search of the robbers, but the greater part, with the policeman, were examining the doors and windows.

"Have you caught them? Don't bring them up here!" screamed Mrs Bramble, from above.

"All right, marm! You've no call to be afraid," said the imperturbable policeman. "There's nothing broken into here," he added to those around. "I dare say all this row is about nothing."

"Indeed it is not," said Phillips, indignantly. "They were trying to break open the door; I shot one of them, and then the rest ran away."

"Oh! you've been dreaming, my lad," said the incredulous policeman.

Phillips turned away from him with dignified contempt, and at that moment a cry was raised—

"Here he is! Here's the body!" Every one ran off to the spot, and sure enough there was the body of a man lying helplessly against the railings.

"He's alive!"

"He is moaning!"

"He is trying to speak!"

"No, he isn't."

"Where's the wound?"

"I can't see one."

"The bullet must have gone through his head!"

"His face is blackened!"

"What a ruffian!"

"Let us chase the others!"

"How lucky we happened to come up!"

"This way, policeman!"

"Fetch a stretcher!"

Without paying much attention to the opinions and suggestions which were showered upon him from every side, the policeman elbowed his way through the crowd, calling upon them to stand back, and flashed his lantern upon the man's face. Phillips and I, who had followed him closely, were horrified to recognise the dark features of Uncle Ned, and began to feel alarmed at what we had done.

"Oh, he's dead!"

"Dead!" said the policeman, scornfully. "Yes, dead drunk, that's about it. Get up, my man, and see if you can't walk as far as the station-house."

"*What's the meaning of all this?*" demanded a too-well-known voice, and looking up, we saw Mr Vialls standing beside us. He was in full evening-dress, having just returned home. Our knees shook under us, our tongues were glued in our mouths, and the policeman began to explain, and——

Surely my readers don't want to hear any more!

I suppose I had better finish my story, and yet I can scarcely bear to tell how we were laughed at by everybody except Mr Vialls, who stormed dreadfully and took away our precious pistol, and how Mrs

Bramble gave us a long lecture, and how we slunk off home with shamed faces, and how the affair got into the county paper, and how, in fact, we learned on all sides that we had made fools of ourselves, though we had nobody's blood on our consciences, for luckily not a single shot had taken effect. We were glad the boys had gone home, for we could not have faced them after what had happened; but when the holidays were over, we had to go through it all, and never heard the end of that story about our desperate encounter with a burglar.

It was a desperate encounter, if we are to believe Phillips' account of it, which I read the other day in a magazine, and which gives a much higher estimate of the courage and coolness that we were called upon to display on the occasion. But this account did not appear for many years afterwards, and Phillips by that time had, no doubt, fully persuaded himself of its truth somehow or other, just as they say that George the Fourth, towards the end of his life, brought himself to believe that he had actually been at the battle of Waterloo. Phillips always had a strong imagination. So long as we were at school, however, we heard nothing of his version of the story; and certainly mine is the true one.

Good often comes out of evil, and it was so in this case. When Uncle Ned grew sober, and learned the risk he had run in his drunken fit, he was so much impressed that he resolved never to let himself be in such a condition again. He took the pledge at once, and I believe he kept it so long as I remained at Whitminster School.



TOM, DICK, AND HARRY.



TOM, DICK, AND HARRY.

THERE is a lucky sort of people upon whom some godmother Fortune seems to have bestowed a most valuable gift. While other men possess talents, virtues, accomplishments, muscles, good looks, good connections, good digestion, good temper, and other earthly goods, these favoured individuals are specially gifted with nothing more nor less than a natural *character for respectability*. They are not wiser or better than other men, often worse and more foolish, but by dint of good broad-cloth, spotless linen, clean-shaved faces, and a quiet demeanour, they contrive to pass through life in such wise as to be blamed by no man, and assume unquestioned a clear right to look down upon unfortunate outcasts, who are always getting into jail, or debt, or

other trouble, seem more acquainted with rags than razors, and know nothing of fine linen, except now and then by stealing it, but perhaps are no less worthy than some of the wearers of purple. This is the case in the great world, as has frequently been remarked by moralists of more authority than the present writer ; and in the little world of school it is no otherwise. There such stripes as may be going have a knack of somehow falling often on the same shoulders ; while other reputations, more or less worthily, seem to have the faculty of flourishing like a green bay-tree. Tom gets the credit of being a good boy ; Dick and Harry get all the thrashing they deserve, and nobody pities them ; nor, in all cases, are they so much to be pitied.

The Tom of my story was such a Tom as I speak of. Not that he was called Tom, for nobody ever thinks of calling such a boy Tom ; but his Christian name was certainly Thomas. In the registers of Whitminster School he was set down as "Thomas Bredgman." In the conversation of his schoolfellows he was rather mentioned as "The Crocodile," or still more commonly as "Crock." I don't know that the crocodile's character for respectability stands any higher in his own country than it does in tales and

books of travel ; but I am sure nobody could have called Thomas Bredgman anything but an eminently respectable boy. At first sight he struck you in this light. He had a fat, placid, dutiful, meek look, that could not fail to set any master's mind at rest. He was never rash or defiant ; he ran no risks of getting into trouble ; an extreme caution marked his dealings in all matters that might be likely to lead him into contact with the ruling powers. He did not do much work, and he did not try to do much ; but he said that he did, and that answered just as well in the case of a boy with such a reputation for propriety. Not that Master Bredgman sought to be distinguished for a high standard of virtue either among boys or masters. Rather he strove not to be discovered in any offence, and, like a juvenile Horace, counted himself happy if he might pass quietly through the trials of school life and escape unnoticed.

Dick was a very different sort of boy ; but before I say what sort of boy he was, I must tell you why he was called Dick, for he *was* called Dick. There are two reasons for which one might expect to be called Dick, and neither of these applied to the present Richard. If there are a pair of brothers in a small school, one or both of them may come to be

called by his Christian name ; but our Dick, poor fellow, had neither brother nor sister in the wide world. Then, again, a boy who is a great favourite among his companions, or a pet of his masters, may be addressed in some such affectionate way ; but I don't know that this Dick was a favourite with any one, certainly not with his masters. No ; Dick was called Dick because you couldn't call him anything else. His surname was De Wilton, nothing less. Now, at the high-flown name of Richard de Wilton, we picture to ourselves a haughty, handsome, noble-minded, Grecian-nosed, aristocratic youth, with thin white hands and smooth flaxen hair. But, in fact, this boy was stumpy, scrubby, sallow, snub-nosed, sandy-haired, with hands always spotted by ink, nails always bit to the quick, trousers always splashed to the knees, hair always in a mess, and a collar almost always crushed. It was said that a clean shirt was served out to De Wilton every Sunday and Thursday, but most observers must have held the existence of this garment to be as fabulous as that of the phoenix. There also went a report that on Sunday morning De Wilton's jacket was not covered with dust, nor his boots with mud, but few would have taken it upon them to affirm this fact.

with any confidence. His skin was one of those which have the mysterious property of attracting dirt from all quarters, and yet, as a sort of compensation, are never dirtier in appearance than when they are clean. And if ever he did get a new suit of clothes, I am sure he never felt happy till he had torn or stained, or otherwise spoiled it for use by any person except a Dick or a Diogenes.

Altogether, Master De Wilton was a very untidy, unruly, unlucky boy, and was, therefore, naturally called Dick. Neither gods, men, nor schoolmasters are kind to Dicks as a rule ; nor do they do justice to themselves. They never get on so well as your steady Roberts and your solid Johns and your sensible Williams. They are a scatterbrained set. Dick always comes in for a greater share of the kicks than of the halfpence that may be going. Wherever there are puddles or troubles, he stumbles into them. He is caught in every scrape and in every shower. So it is little wonder if, on their passage through life, these Dicks can seldom manage to keep their coats clean or their skins tender.

As example, let us take one of Dick's school-days, and mark how he was wont to fare at the hands of the masters, and other powerful persons. He began

by being unlucky, for somebody had hid his stockings, or, at least, he couldn't find them, and was late for breakfast, and had a hundred lines for that. Then, at prayers, Bredgman asked him a question, and he answered, and the head-master saw him, and Dick had a lecture before the whole school, and the Catechism to write out by next Saturday. I need not say that he broke down in his repetition, and had twenty-two mistakes in his exercise, and was kept in. Bredgman had twenty-four mistakes, but he wasn't kept in, as he protested he had been "doing his best." This injustice moved Dick, when they got out, to snatch off Bredgman's cap and kick it round the playground, and where should he kick it but into the face of Charteris, the great, the bewhiskered, the collared, the tail-coated, the champion of the sixth form, who immediately waxed wroth, and resented this insult to his dignity by an unceremonious but effectual thrashing. After that Dick made friends again with the Crocodile, and they were walking home together, and munching the pie of peace in company, when they were encountered by Mr Vialls, who gave Dick an hour's detention for demeaning the school by eating pastry in public. Bredgman had been cunning enough to pop the evidence of his guilt

under his jacket, and as Dick had paid for both tarts, perhaps it was fair that he only should be punished. After dinner he wrote an imposition, and had ten minutes over in which to play ball in a place where to play ball was forbidden. In these ten minutes he managed to break a window as well as a rule, and had a "row" from Mrs Pearson, and a threat that his pocket-money should be stopped. At afternoon school he did not fail to get into more trouble. He was caught prompting another boy, and caned. This infliction settled him for a little, but soon he began to pluck up spirit and to draw a caricature of Mr Williamson on his slate, and of course Mr Williamson was looking over his shoulder. Here you would think his troubles were finished for the day, but it was not so. In the evening, at the schoolhouse, some boys were impudent to the matron, and she reported Dick as the worst of them to Mr Vials, and he was sent for to be caned again, and then it was discovered that his hands were quite black, and that he had been illegally forging in the coal-hole, and caught it all the worse, as soon as he had removed from his poor paws the slight protection afforded by a coating of dirt. Then he went in to preparation, and sowed for himself a crop of fresh troubles to come up next day.

For, instead of learning his own lessons, he either essayed to help his neighbours with a sort of despondent yet resigned air of sulky good-nature, which only those who knew Dick can picture to themselves, or, sadly and solemnly, as was his wont, he took his pastime in throwing paper pellets across the room, and more likely than not—for this also was his wont—got caught, and was again consigned to the tender mercies of the furies of schoolboy life.

But you are not to understand that he was as unhappy as he was unfortunate. At the best of times he seemed to wear a gloomy, care-worn look ; but at the worst, I don't think that he was really very wretched, though he was perhaps not so cheerful as a Dick ought to be. Schoolboys have a great deal of a very useful sort of philosophy, which enables them to get through their troubles with less pain than might be supposed. The boy, boyish and determined to enjoy his boyishness, not the zeal of masters ordering hard things, not the frown of the tyrant standing over him, can shake from his healthy mind, neither the Rev. Smith, the turbid ruler of the unquiet fourth form, nor even the great hand of the head-master, wielding no *brutum fulmen*. If, as we have been assured upon excellent authority, the efforts of a whole legion of titled and

talented philanthropists are unavailing to make one shoeblack truly happy, it is no less a fact that to make one Dick utterly miserable is beyond the compass of human power, far as the ingenuity of the scholastic world has gone towards it, with such instruments as Latin Grammar and Greek Delectus. So this Dick would dry his tears and exhibit his bruises, and hope for the day when he should be a man, and should be able to play ball from morning till night, and in the meantime go off to amuse himself by getting into some fresh scrape.

A very different day, you may be sure, had been passed by his companion, Mr Bredgman. He also began the morning by being late, but then he managed to persuade the master that he had come down in time, and had only gone back to get his pocket-handkerchief. At school he looked proper and attentive; indulging in no unseemly vagaries without making quite sure that so to do was quite safe under the circumstances. He certainly broke down in his lessons and said he was very sorry, and would try not to do it again, and looked like it; and offered with much politeness to carry some books for the master, and got the credit of being a dutiful, well-meaning fellow, who gave little trouble. In the afternoon, he walked

quietly and genteely home, picking his footsteps on the pavement, and not getting into disgrace with the matron, like poor Dick, who must needs go jumping over a ditch, and tumbling therein, and making his clothes in a nice mess ; though, by-the-bye, this process must have been as necessary and easy as that of gilding fine gold and painting the lily white. So when he—not Dick, oh, dear no !—was asked to tea with Mrs Pearson, our friend the Crocodile had little to do but brush his hair and arrange his necktie, and then proceed to spend a very pleasant evening, free from the fear of Mr Vials, as Mrs Pearson's guests were always considered to be, her parlour being a sanctuary into which neither cane nor grammar had power to penetrate. And when disreputable Dick laid his shaggy little mane upon his pillow, and hastened off to the blessed land of Nod, where Heaven has given it to careless youngsters to forget bruises and tumbles and scoldings, Master Bredgman neatly folded up his clothes, and got into the next bed with a clear conscience, a whole skin, an unblemished character, and a pear which he had stolen from Mrs Pearson's cupboard.

It will be perceived by the discerning reader, that Thomas Bredgman was not without his share of the

faults that afflict humanity. Of one he had more than his share ; luckily it was not one which brought him often into violent and unpleasant contact with the authorities. He was very greedy. It was said that he never opened his mouth unless to eat something, or to talk of something to eat ; but I don't think this could have been true. He certainly thought a great deal on the subject, and lost no opportunity of putting his thoughts in practice. He must have been in his element in the tart-shop ; but as he generally went there alone, there is not much trustworthy evidence as to his prowess upon this field of action. At our table he was limited in the display of his talents, and he gave us to understand that he entertained the most noble scorn for our simple fare ; still it was worth while to notice the keen glance with which he watched every plate as it passed from under the hands of the carver, and the eager nods and winks with which he pursued the servants, as they carried about desirable portions, and the smile of benevolent satisfaction which spread over his usually placid countenance, when a juicy, generous slice was at length placed before him. On the other hand, it was appalling to see the black look with which he received a plate of tart without a sufficient proportion of apples,

and touching to hear the plaintive tones that his voice would assume when nobody would listen to his entreaties to pass the mustard. He might also be observed waiting behind, while the dinner things were being cleared away, to steal a piece of cheese, or beg a handful of sugar from the servants, to whom he was very civil upon such occasions. He could frown, and threaten too, could the Crocodile, but more generally his manners were extremely polite and pleasant. He was especially polite to any one who had a hamper. New boys he treated with great courtesy and kindness; you would see him condescending to go about with them, and explain to them the ways of school, and then accompanying them to the matron's room, where their good things were kept. An amiable look of friendliness would overspread his countenance on such occasions; but the new boys that he thus honoured did not always seem to appreciate his acquaintance; and once Mrs Bramble discovered that a little fellow whom Bredgman had conveyed to her room was scarcely able for tears to ask that some of his cake might be given to his dear and disinterested friend. Who will blame our worthy matron if she thereupon boxed the Crocodile's ears well and forbade him her room for the future? But he was not so easily dis-

couraged in his patronage of youthful innocence ; one would see him prowling about the passages and way-laying fortunate cubs behind doors, and by all means in his power—sometimes by begging, sometimes by bullying, sometimes by a mixture of the two—endeavouring to compass the grand end and aim of his existence—getting something to eat. A new boy with plenty of cake and jam would have been the greatest blessing that could befall Bredgman, if it were not that some of the big fellows had, from more or less pure and virtuous motives, a knack of interfering in these unnatural intimacies, and bestowing a kick or two upon the friend of the helpless. Perhaps, on the whole, his happiest moments were those spent at tea with Mrs Pearson, where his tastes had secure scope, and his virtues were more appreciated than among the rough crowd of schoolboys. To him, and the like of him, our mistress's parlour was indeed a little heaven below.

I am afraid we were all chargeable to some extent with this same fault of greediness. Boys are greedy and grumbling animals, and though we were well fed at Whitminster, as schools go, we were, of course, not quite satisfied. As a rule, we managed to dispose of our meals with great relish, in spite of the sauce of

discontent with which we chose to flavour them ; but we had always the pleasure of hugging to our bosoms one or two grievances—notably that “stiff Dick ” or “inflexible Richard,” which made its unwelcome appearance on Fridays. By-the-bye, our friend the Crocodile liked this dainty, and contracted with his neighbour, Prior, for his weekly supply upon very low terms.

My story, which takes so long in introducing, is supposed to be of the time just after the summer holidays, when our stomachs were proudest, and, fresh from the flesh-pots of home and rich in pocket-money and hampers, we were able to be more fastidious than a few weeks later, when our money had gone the way of all silver. Now there would be one turning up his dainty little nose at honest bread-and-butter ; and another moaning pitifully that we had “nothing for dinner but beef and mutton ;” and you might see sturdy fellows making themselves sick at the “tuck-shop,” and then sending away plates of wholesome food, which their tart-crammed stomachs chose to consider as unsavoury. On pudding-days this was not wise, as Mrs Pearson was apt to see you, and say that you weren’t to have anything more ; rather awkward when, as was often the case, a very popular

pudding succeeded a joint of the reverse character. There were ways of getting over this difficulty. We would slip our helpings into our pocket-handkerchiefs, and find an opportunity of getting rid of what thousands of our fellow-creatures would have been grateful for. I remember making one of half-a-dozen thoughtless boys who one day concealed some boiled mutton thus, and made up a large parcel of good meat, and threw it into the river, and chuckled at having played a clever trick.

God forgive our sinful selfishness! That very night, not three hundred yards from where we, who had never known one of the real troubles of life, were sleeping warmly and comfortably, a poor woman, famished and exhausted, lay down in the snow, and for the last time clasped a tender infant to her faintly beating heart. Mother and child died there—died for want of the food we wasted; and in the grey morning, at the hour when we were lazily turning in bed, and murmuring against the hard fates that ruled our lives and rang the inexorable bell at half-past-six, the two bodies were found, and excited ten times as much sympathy and attention as, a few hours before, would have saved these lives. We heard the story, and were perhaps a little shocked, and chatted about

it at dinner, and rejoiced that we had roast-veal, and were troubled to find that there was no stuffing.

What am I talking about?—and all this time I have been forgetting to introduce you to Harry; though I suppose my story is more than half over, so far as length goes. Harry's other name was Kennedy, and my readers have perhaps heard of him before.

Here, then, at length, we have Tom, Dick, and Harry sitting together one afternoon in the sick-room. I told you that the holidays were just over, and that the boys had plenty of pocket-money; I might as well have told you that it was the fruit season, apples not quite ripe, and so on; you will guess the rest. There were a good many cases of illness at the school-house, none of them very serious, luckily, for the matron had gone off to visit a dying relative. Old Dr Grey was at no loss for her nursing services, however; all that these autumn invalids required, he said, was a little Gregory's powder and low diet. You may imagine the disgust of young gentlemen who had made themselves ill through greediness, and found themselves sentenced to slops! A day of idleness in the sick-room did not compensate for this, and most of Dr Grey's young patients made a very rapid recovery from the disease of over-eating.

It was this that Tom Bredgman and Dick De Wilton were suffering from. I should like to be able to say that Harry Kennedy was ill from some other cause, for I wish my readers to think well of him, but I can't tell lies. The three were yawning in the sick-room one afternoon while the other boys were at school. Their hands were idle; we shall see what was found for them to do.

"Oh! how jolly these plums in the Pearson's garden look!" sighed Bredgman, with his head stretched out of the window. "Don't you wish we had some, you fellows?"

"Much good wishing will do us," said Dick, trying to balance the poker on his nose.

"I think it's a shame!" burst out the Crocodile. "Our fathers pay no end of money for us here, and it's a shame not to let us go into the garden and help ourselves as we do at home."

"There wouldn't be much left, Crock, after you had been helping yourself," laughed Harry.

There was a pause. Dick let the poker fall, and proceeded to experiment with the tongs; Harry, in spite of his character as an invalid, tried to stand on his head; and Bredgman, after pensively leaning on the window-sill, resumed his dolorous complaint.

"It's a horrid place ! What good does it do us to be half-starved, I should like to know ? Why can't they give us better grub, and we would pay more ? I won't stand it. There has been nothing but roast mutton and boiled mutton all this week, and a fellow has to go to the tuck-shop, and can't help getting ill ; and then giving us nothing but that beastly rice ! Fellows who are ill ought to be fed upon port-wine and beef-steaks ; I have heard no end of doctors and people say so. I wish I was away from this place."

"I wish my money wasn't all gone," said Dick, taking a more practical view of the situation.

"I wish," began the Crocodile, with a deep sigh—and just then the door opened, and enter one of the servants. "Oh ! I wish, Sally, you would bring us just a little thin bread-and-butter with some sugar on it ; Please do, Sally ; you can easily get it out of the kitchen, you know."

"Get out with you, Master Bredgman," said Sally. "You can ask Missus if you want anything ; she sent me to say that she wishes to speak to you."

"Oh ! she's going to give me something," cried Bredgman, joyfully accompanying the servant downstairs.

In his absence Harry tried for the tenth time to

interest himself in a book which had been brought from the school library for his use, and Dick set to work filling up his diary. To inform him of some important events in Dick's life, we hereby present the reader with a page of it—

Sunday—Wet—the sole caim of my boots. Wrote home.

Monday—Cain from Vials.

Tuesday—Impo. Row from Dalton. Six weeks to Mikelmas hollidays.

Wednesday—Detention 2 hours, 150 lines. Cained. Bought a katty-pult.

Thursday—broke a window.

Friday—2 Impos. ofered to fight young Sargent, but he wouldint. Circus came to Whitminster ; they won't let us go. Row abot Mrs B.'s cat.

Saturday—not kept in ; got my p. money ; ete 6 tartes and 2d. of coco-nut.

Sunday—began to be unwel.

Dick was sucking his pen, and trying to think of anything that he might record of his life in the sick-room, when the door opened, and back came Bredgman with his mouth full.

"She has been giving me some of these very identical plums," he announced.

"Why didn't you bring us some?"

"Oh! she didn't offer me any for you."

"Of course! We're not favourites."

"Look here!" said Bredgman, shutting the door

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and sinking his voice. "Are you fellows game for something?"

"I should rather say so," cried Harry. "Anything better than kicking one's heels here all day. I don't see why we shouldn't go out. The doctor said we might."

"And I don't see why we shouldn't have some of these plums," said the Crocodile.

"How?"

"Take them! It's easy to get over the garden wall from the playground."

"Oh, no!" said Harry, hastily.

"Why not? There's not the slightest chance of being found out. All the fellows are at school, and all the servants are at dinner. Mother P. is going to have a nap—she told me so herself, and she always sleeps for an hour just at this time. What can be easier than to slip over the wall and take a few plums? They will never be missed, and nobody will ever know."

"I'm not sure about that," said Dick. "I always get found out at everything."

"But I never do. What do you say, Kennedy?"

"I won't have anything to do with it," said Harry, "I don't think——"

"Well, nobody cares what you think," said the

Crocodile, with less suavity of manner than was usual to him. "Come, Dick, you are not afraid, at any rate."

"Who said I was afraid?"

"Well, let us go out, anyhow," and Bredgman sallied forth, followed by the others.

Presently Harry had gone off somewhere by himself, and the other two were walking in the gravelled court that ran by the garden wall.

"Never mind that fool Kennedy. He's a nice fellow to be so stuck up and particular, as if he and his precious brother were any better than other people! There isn't any harm in it. We pay to live in this house, and we have as much right to the fruit as anybody. Besides, if they give us nothing but rice-puddings for dinner, we must help ourselves. I'm sure the other fellows wouldn't say there was any harm in it, but we needn't tell them. You can't think what jolly plums they are? I'll make young Kennedy hold his tongue, if he sees anything; but I expect he will take good care not to see. Anyhow he is scarcely mean enough to go and tell. Come, man, you are not such a muff, surely?"

"How will you manage it?" asked Dick, wavering.

"Easy as anything. That bench by the wall—put

your foot on the back of it and hoist yourself up. There's a pear-tree on the other side that you can get back by. You can tie two handkerchiefs together and make a bag. I'll stand here and keep *cave*."

"Oh, I thought you were going to go over."

"Well, but you are lighter than me. I wish I had one of them in my mouth just now. It was shabby of her not to send some up to you, and she can't complain if you go and help yourself to two or three. I wish Kennedy hadn't gone away; we might have had three handkerchiefs, and made a good big bag. It's a splendid tree, and full of them."

Two or three minutes after this Harry looked into the court-yard and saw them knotting their handkerchiefs together. Not wishing to have anything to do with it, he went away again and left them to follow out their plan by themselves.

"Why don't you go over?" asked Bredgman, impatiently.

Dick had put his foot on the bench that was to help him over the wall, but now he drew it back.

"I say, I don't half like it."

"Oh, nonsense!" exclaimed the Crocodile, quite angry at this display of hesitation. "I tell you there's not the slightest chance of being found out. Every

soul about the place is doing something that will keep them away from the garden. I'll tell you what I'll do, if you like: I'll go over the wall, and you shall stay here and watch; only then it will be fair that I have the biggest share of the plums. Will you agree to that?"

"I tell you what, I won't have anything more to do with it," said Dick. "I'm going off to Kennedy."

"Don't! stop! I say, Dick, this is shabby; you know you promised to help me, and I didn't think you were the fellow to be frightened just at the last minute, and when there's not the slightest possible chance of being caught. Just wait a minute, there's a good fellow."

"Look sharp, then; I won't have anything to do with it, but I'll keep *cave*."

"Well, look here: when you hear me whistle, come to this part of the wall, and I'll lay the bag on the top, and you'll take it up and go and hide it, and then I'll come over a little afterwards, for it wouldn't do for me to be seen coming over the wall with a bag in my hand. If I hadn't anything I could say that I had gone over to fetch a ball. But there's no chance of anybody seeing me."

Keeping up his spirits with this assurance, the

Crocodile hoisted himself to the top of the wall and dropped down on the other side. When he had seen him safe over, Dick walked across the court kicking the gravel about, and wondering where Kennedy was ; and suddenly Kennedy rushed in, crying in a loud whisper—

“Look out ! Here’s Mrs P. !”

True to instinct of schoolboy loyalty, Dick was about to shout out to Bredgman, but it was too late, for Mrs Pearson entered the court a moment after Harry, and Dick felt that it would be dangerous to attract her attention. So, hoping that she would go away in a minute, he tried to look unconcerned, and lounged in the opposite direction to the garden wall.

“Are you boys better ?” asked Mrs Pearson graciously, as she passed them. “I dare say it won’t do you any harm to be out this warm day, but you must take great care not to catch cold.”

“No, ma’am,” said Dick, not knowing what he said.

“And see, boys, I am going to sit down on that bench in the shade and go to sleep for a little. Will you keep at the other end of the court, and not make a noise, like good boys ?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Then, to Dick’s horror, he saw her walk up to the

very bench by which Bredgman had made his way into the garden, and sit down there, opening her parasol, laying a book by her side, and disposing herself so comfortably that it seemed as if she was going to spend the afternoon there.

"Is Bredgman there?" asked Harry, whispering.

"Yes; what shall we do? I say, here's a nice thing!"

"Is there no way to get him out of the scrape?"

"I told him he oughtn't to. Couldn't we get her away somehow? Let us two pretend to get up a fight."

"That would be no good. The thing is, to get her out of the court. Let us go into the yard and begin throwing stones, and she will come after us, shall we? We should get into a nice row ourselves, though."

"Not half so bad as Bredgman," said Dick. "But I think the best thing to do would be to run into the house and get some of the servants to fetch her away for something or other. Come on; we must look sharp."

The two boys had turned and were making for the entrance of the court as fast as they could without exciting suspicion, when from the other side of the garden wall a voice made itself distinctly heard—

"Are you there?"

Dick and Harry stopped in consternation, and Mrs Pearson started up and peered about her, rubbing her eyes and saying—

"Who's there?"

"What do you say?" answered Bredgman.

Mrs Pearson looked suspiciously at the two boys who stood near her, not knowing what to say or do. Both of them would willingly have warned Bredgman that he had an auditor more than he had bargained for, but they durst not speak, and could only look at each other and fidget before Mrs Pearson's eye. She began to understand the state of the case, and kept quite quiet.

"I say, Dick," cried Bredgman, "just look and see that Mother P. is not peeping out of one of the windows, will you? I dare say she is snoring like an old cow; but it's as well to be sure."

Mrs Pearson got very red, and Dick and Harry made a great effort not to laugh, but not an altogether successful one. The scene was becoming too ludicrous. The Crocodile heard the sounds of stifled laughter, and thought they were making fun of him.

"Come, Dick, this is shabby. I didn't know you were going to humbug me. At all events you had



The head of the triumphant Crocodile appeared above the wall. 'What are you standing grinning at there? where are my plums?' He looked down, and—horror!— . . .—STORIES OF WHITMINSTER, p. 105.

nothing to do with bagging the plums, and I'll not give you a single one. Are you there? Can't you speak?"

How could he say a word with Mrs Pearson shaking her parasol at him, and he afraid to open his mouth for fear of screaming with laughter in her face!

"Look here! If you'll lift them down I'll give you a few. Tell young Kennedy, if he's there, that I'll half kill him if he tells."

A bag of plums was now laid on the wall and duly received by Mrs Pearson, who put them down on the bench, and stood looking up like a cat waiting at a mouse-hole.

"Now don't you touch them till I come," cried Bredgman, who could be heard working his way up the wall, with no small injury to the fruit-tree that served him as a ladder. "They are all mine, remember; you had nothing to do with it; I took them all; I told you I should not get caught;" and with this the head of the triumphant Crocodile appeared above the wall.

"What are you standing grinning at there? Where are my plums?"

He looked down, and—horror!—

* * * * *

This is very like a farce, but my drama is to end tragically. The scene suddenly changes to the Chamber of Horrors. A few hours are supposed to have elapsed. Mr Vialls is discovered, armed. Enter Bredgman. Striking tableau!

We shrink from entering further into the harrowing details of this scene. But perhaps some readers do not understand what avenging fury it was that overtook our friend the Crocodile. Well, then, as I have quoted a week from Dick's diary, I may as well make public a leaf from Bredgman's. *Voici* :—

Monday—Weather fine; plums very dear this year. Seventeen pudding-days to the holidays.

Tuesday—Veal-pie for dinner; very good.

Wednesday—Wet day; apple-tart for first time. Began *Tupto*. Williamson in a wax; said he would give me an impo. next time. Bought a pound of acid-drops.

Thursday—Began new cheese; not very good; Matthews', six tarts and two bottles of ginger-beer. Wrote home.

Friday—Boiled leg of mutton—beastly; all the capers had gone before it came to me.

Saturday—Letter from home. 5s. Matthews'; roast mut.; pudding, more plums than last time; Abbing gave me some apples.

Sunday—In sick-room, not at church—medicine; roast beef and greengage-tart; pears from young Kennedy; looked over "Punch;" went to bed; very pleasant day.

Monday—Slops for dinner; wish I was better; went into Pearson's garden—*had an awful licking*.

A HISTORY OF HAMPERS.



A HISTORY OF HAMPER.

IT is nothing very new to say that the pains and pleasures of schoolboys seem very great and real to us so long as we are in jackets, and very insignificant when once we have seen the downy whiskers sprouting on our smooth cheeks; yet the philosophic student of human nature might do well to take more account of that knowledge of his subject which is to be obtained from the sayings and doings of boys. The public have lately been pleased to look at history in little, being tickled by the conceit of Dame Europa, and a very good conceit it is, for if school is nothing but a little world, what is the world but a great school? Here we have in the same form Master John Bull, who is the parlour boarder of Europe, and whom the other boys hate because he is never caned and has more pocket-money than the

rest of them, and gives himself such airs, too, about it ; and Master Jacques Bonhomme, who is so fond of fighting, only he always says it isn't fair when he is licked ; and Master Fritz, who is no end strong and clever, but makes himself so disagreeable in many ways, especially by a habit he has of blowing a big brass trumpet in the other fellows' ears when they are learning their lessons ; and these two little scrubby Scandinavian brothers, who get so snubbed and bullied now, though the others used to be precious afraid of them once on a time ; and Master Ivan, that big overgrown boy, who isn't half so stupid as he looks, and intends to be cock of the school some day ; and Master Osman, whom Ivan is always bullying, a lazy, greedy fellow who is never out of debt, and will get expelled soon if he doesn't look out ; and that disreputable little scamp beside Osman, the fellow who was once at the head of the form but is now at the very bottom, and couldn't get on at all if some of the big fellows hadn't helped him a bit ; and Master Kaiser, who is so proud of his high connections, but Fritz gave him an awful licking not long ago, and they say he is very delicate now ; and that slim pretty boy, who was on the original foundation of the school and used to lead the singing in chapel, where he looked very angelic in his surplice,

but, between you and me, was no better than the rest of us ; and Master Hidalgo, who is always quarrelling, though he can't find anybody to quarrel with but himself ; and last, but certainly not least, that overgrown young Jonathan, who is not a bad fellow in his way, but too fond of bragging that he can beat the whole school at arithmetic or anything else. There ! I make a present of all these fine ideas to future historians, only stipulating that they will consent to reverse the process for a little, and join me in putting the history of a real school under the microscope.

For schools, like nations, have their histories, in which, too, the celebrated fight between Smith and Brown, and the unjust execution of Robinson, and the great cricket-match on the Field of the Cloth of Gold or elsewhere, are in the eyes of the vulgar the most striking incidents, while the wise spectator takes a wider and deeper view ; and on this miniature stage, among the same mob of characters, tyrants, traitors, agitators, innovators, martyrs, warriors, among the same shifting scenes of good and evil fortune, among the same succession of labours, changes, heart-burnings, rebellions, oppressions, it is given him to behold the meaning and purpose of the great drama that is being played out here as in all earthly times and places,

how in schools, sects, nations, worlds, right is fighting against might, and slowly, painfully, fitfully, yet surely, winning back the inheritance of freedom that once belonged to the sons of heaven. And such an observer will see, also, that boys, like men, are all too ignorant of the part which they must needs be playing in this struggle of life, wherein the humblest actor, willing or unwilling, conscious or unconscious, is daily and hourly striking a blow on the right side—or the wrong one.

Many boys, I fear, will turn away in disgust from this long and grave paragraph ; some, I hope, will read it through again and think over it. And if I should be lucky enough to have any older readers, I would ask them to think of the subject that for the moment is engrossing the attention of the grown-up nation, and then to recall their school-days and try if they cannot there recollect a similar movement, scandal, exploit, on a smaller scale. I declare a most interesting book might be made out of the history of any school for a single year. Or better, if one were to take up the history of one of those customs or institutions, which are so powerful in schools as in other communities, and to show how it arose and flourished, and how it was destroyed, perhaps by a

long and slow process of natural decay, perhaps by the vigorous action of a skilful and powerful ruler, perhaps by one of those striking and unexpected events that are called accidents, more likely by all these means combined. This might be worth reading by old and young.

For instance—now, light-minded reader, be patient with me, and we shall come to my tale before long—I should like to write “The History of Hampers at Whitminster School.” First of all would come a preliminary disquisition upon the parental love which is natural to humanity, and the love of good-eating which seems peculiarly natural to Britons. Then it would have to be shown how this institution had its root in a long past condition of affairs; how, when the hum of Latin Grammar was first heard in Whitminster cloisters, the young scholars were poorly lodged and sparsely fed, and how fond mediæval mothers, anxious for the health of their darlings, were in the right of it to send full and frequent consignments, not of mere sweets, but of solid bread and beef and pasty to keep up young master’s strength as well as spirits till the long-looked-for day when, seated on a horse before one of his father’s trusty servants, he should trot home to the dear delights of grange,

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or hall, or castle. Next might be traced through centuries a sketch of the ameliorated lot of the schoolboy tribe, showing how they came to be better fed at school, and how in consequence, hampers from home grew more rare and less substantial, though still containing goodly hams, and store of apples and cakes and other dainties, enabling the recipient for the time to set stick-jaw and sky-blue at defiance. Next, we should come to see how, as is natural when boys are better off in every way, and have more pocket-money, and go back by express train three or four times a year to the maternal cupboards, a hamper comes, if at all, only once, about the middle of a term, or so, and is intended more as a salad than a full meal, being probably composed according to some such recipe as the following, given me by a matron of much experience:—

“*A Schoolboy's Hamper.*—The best groundwork for this is a large wholesome plum-cake, made at home if possible, if not, bought from a good baker. (A very rich hamper may be made with a goose or hare, or a couple of fowls or ducks, but these are not necessary.) Fill the bottom of the hamper with apples—large, rosy-cheeked ones are best—oranges, or any other fruit that will bear knocking about.

Then put in the cake wrapped in thick brown paper. On the top of this lay one box of French plums, two small tins of potted meat, two pots of marmalade, two of raspberry jam, and one of red-currant jelly. (Some boys prefer honey, but this is a matter of taste.) Fill up the vacant spaces with biscuits and nuts, and add kind messages from home *ad lib*. When ready, cord carefully and despatch by passenger train. *N.B.*—A bottle of currant or elder wine—not sherry—greatly improves the flavour.”

Only one addition need be made to this excellent recipe, and it may be made in the language of the poet—

“Let some bright silver lurk among the rest,
Unseen at first, to give a double zest.”

The historian of hampers might have to go on to tell of a time when boys had grown so luxurious and had so much money that they despised such home-supplied dainties. But when I was at Whitminster we did not despise them. The day when a hamper arrived was to us one marked with the whitest of stones, a day when, on our weary journey from one blooming vacation to another, we arrived at a sweet oasis in the desert of bread-and-scrape. Cakes and fruits are nice things all the world over, but it need

not be explained that they are nicer than ever at school. Then there was the pleasure of being a person of importance, of strutting about with the lordly dignity of having favours to bestow, of being temporarily on excellent terms with the best society of your little world ; for such, too, is life, and the boy or man to whose lot may have fallen a hamper, will never want friends to share it, and great personages with titles or tail-coats, as the case may be, who the day before would have passed him by with a contemptuous kick or stare, will now be eager to be hand-and-glove with him, so long as his good fortune last. But there are real friends among the rest, perhaps, and you feel the genial glow of hospitality as you invite them to partake of your dainties, and hear their honest praises of home-made cake and jam. Nor, as we have said, is the taste of these otherwise than most sweet in your own mouth, though shame and woe be upon the juvenile monster in human shape who eats up all himself on the sly !

Very few boys would eat up all if they could, and in our day very few could do so if they would. To explain fully how this was, I must now resume the grave pen of the historian, and go back to the "good old times" when Whitminster School was founded.

In these much-regretted times there was a better opinion than is now held of

“ The good old rule, the simple plan,
That they should take who have the power,
And they should keep who can.”

Persons in authority naturally looked upon this maxim with great favour; and, on the other hand, people who were peaceable and weak had to submit more or less willingly to a good deal of oppression, especially if they were Jews or otherwise objectionable characters. The prefects were the nobility of our school, and as the prefects' papas, the nobility of the country, set them an example, those young aristocrats were not behindhand in grasping at as large a share in the good things of their little state as came within their reach. So they lost no time in making a decree—the exact date of which is uncertain—that every younger boy who had anything sent him, should make a declaration of the same to their honourable body, and should be content with such portion of it as they might be pleased to leave him, the rest falling to their share. Any disobedience to or evasion of this law was liable to be punished by a chastisement to which the “tannings” and “tundings” of our degenerate days would seem a mere

flea-bite. When young Bois de Guilbert, then, received a hamper of the period, he was fain, unless his big brother were able and willing to interfere, to see the best part of it gobbled up by Front de Bœuf Major, and his worshipful colleagues in office, and could only comfort himself by thinking that in time he too might rise to rank and power, and have his will of the hampers of the next generation.

Time rolled on, and it began to be understood that the right of bullying and robbing was not the most noble prerogative of the great. But the nobility of our school were found stiffly conservative.

"We are unwilling," they said, solemnly, "to change the laws of Whitminster. Here is a good old custom, established by our wise predecessors, sanctioned by the usage of centuries, and highly agreeable to our interests. Rash innovators must be severely corrected; for what else do we hold power unless to maintain the constitution of the school?"

But not all the power of bearded and unbearded rulers could put a stop to the spread of revolutionary opinions, and here and there turbulent discontented spirits were found grumbling against the order of things, and asking themselves such presumptuous

questions as, "If I have a hamper sent me, is it not mine, to do what I like with? What right have big Brown and Jones and Robinson to help themselves out of it? If my mother wished to let them have her ham or jam, would she not have sent it to them, and not to me? Have they not mothers of their own to send them hampers? Have they not more pocket-money than me to buy good things for themselves? And do they not manage to get the best of all that is going here, and leave me and my equals the fat and scraggy bits? Surely it isn't fair."

If the young speculator on the rights of property were cautious, he kept these opinions to himself, and patiently submitted to the established order of things till he, too, got into the sixth form, and became a Conservative, and saw the wisdom and advantage of customs that had formerly seemed so unjust. If he were rash or ill-tempered, as sometimes happened, he murmured openly, and then the nobility reasoned with him, for by this time they had found that it was necessary to reason, after a fashion, with sceptics, and not condemn them to the torture without a trial.

"Young Smith," would say Big Brown and Jones and Robinson, "do you rightly consider what a crime you are committing against the order of society?"

Clearly this right which we possess must be held just and beneficial, for at least six reasons. First, because when we were in the lowest form, we had to put up with the same apparent hardship as you now foolishly complain of, and must, therefore, be allowed to serve you in the same way. Second, because it is evident that if small boys were allowed to keep their hampers entirely to themselves, they would probably over-eat themselves and be sick, which it is the duty of a good government to prevent. Thirdly, if we were to make a change in this custom, we should soon be called upon to change other customs, and religion, morality, loyalty, etc., would be swept away. Fourthly, because for hundreds of years this school has prospered under the system you object to, and if any change were made in that system, the school would of course cease to flourish. Fifthly, because you are to bring your hamper here immediately and allow us to inspect it. Sixthly, because if you don't, we'll give you a thundering thrashing." And these reasons, and the conclusion reached through them, were generally found convincing.

This is an old, true story—an oft-told and an oft-acted one. Wherever and whenever anything unjust is done under the sun by men or boys, there will

always be found some to stand up for it, to argue in favour of it, to say that because it has been done, it should go on being done ; and many will be found to look on, with more or less quietness and satisfaction, and see it done ; and a few—thank heaven !—will be found to say that it is wrong, and that it shall NOT be done, if honest hearts and brave arms can put an end to it. Here and there, in the darkest ages of history, one or two such hearts and arms are seen struggling nobly against tyrants, idols, inquisitions, armies, vested interests, public opinions, and so forth ; and though these heroes fall with broken spirits and bleeding limbs, and their cause seems to be as hopelessly lost as their lives, it is not so, for neither sword, nor flame, nor torture, nor hatred, nor scorn, can slay freedom, and the very blood and tears of their victims are the death of tyranny and injustice.

In the history of this great battle which has been, and is being, and is still to be fought over the whole world, an account of the establishment of what may be called the law of *Habeas Hamper* may seem a very unimportant and prosaic episode, but it is not unlike the narrative of the establishment in our country of many other laws which most of us admit to be anything but unimportant. When I first went to

Whitminster, the Hamper question had come to stand thus :

Our nobility, like our potentates, had found themselves so far unable to oppose the march of reform, that they had gradually conceded the following points, while maintaining the great principle for which they contended :—

1st, The middle classes were exempted to a great extent from the law of Hampers, and, unless in special cases, tribute was exacted only from the lower classes, or smallest boys, who might also gain exemption through the influence of a big brother or other powerful patron.

2d, Not so much was taken as in olden times ; the prefects yielded to the spirit of the age so far as to leave a small boy a full half or perhaps two-thirds of his possessions.

3d, A small boy paying tribute was treated with greater civility, as if it were a question of favour rather than of right, and, except in very aggravated cases, the practice of kicking him when his mother had not put enough plums in the cake, was discontinued.

The first of these concessions was an exceedingly wise one, for the most violent and formidable opposition had hitherto proceeded from the middle classes,

who now, being free from the imposition, were found willing to take a more favourable view of it, and to give their firm support to that part of the constitution. But, on the other hand, the lower classes found themselves very little if at all benefited; for when the prefects made greater exactions on their own account, they held it a duty to prevent any one else from robbing loyal subjects, whereas, their own rights being so curtailed, they now withdrew this protection, and the middle classes began to agitate the Whig doctrine that they, too, had a right to feed at the expense of their juniors, so that a small boy not unfrequently found all his hamper swallowed up by the requisitions of old and new tyrants. Consequently there was more discontent than ever among the lower classes, some of whom, in their helplessness, were unpatriotic enough to call in a foreign power to their aid; that is to say, their mammas and Mrs Pearson, who took up their cause warmly. The result of this was, that complaint was made to Mr Vials, the then master of the schoolhouse. Such disloyalty was only a natural consequence of the principles introduced into our state by that most revolutionary measure the Emancipation of the Fags, which had taken place not long before.

It is now time to consider the character of the ruler in whose reign this agitation was successfully brought to an end. Mr Vialls was a master of the old school, and had hitherto governed upon sound constitutional principles. That is to say, he had impartially thrashed all the boys in the lower forms, and had not interfered when the bigger ones thrashed them also. So, though he was not very popular with any class, he possessed the confidence of the Conservative party, and was considered a tolerably efficient governor. But, in this emergency, he behaved in a most unexpected way. Instead of hushing up the complaints that were made, and maintaining the constitution which he was bound to defend, he astonished every one by claiming a monopoly of oppression, and swore by his magisterial prerogative that from henceforth there should be Free Trade in Hampers.

The surrender of the Duke of Wellington to the Catholic Emancipation movement, the secession of Sir Robert Peel from the cause of the Corn Laws, the conversion of Mr Disraeli to the Reform of the Franchise, none of these celebrated political events caused such consternation as this one did among our Conservative party. Mr Vialls might, with comparative safety, have attacked the constitution on any other

point; he might have abolished thrashing, he might have introduced solitary confinement and such like un-Whitminsterial punishments; he might have disestablished the prefects, he might have altered our table of lessons, he might have put down the celebration of the Fifth of November and the Twenty-ninth of May, he might have levied an income-tax on our pocket-money; but if he wished to hold office in peace, surely he should have remembered that young Britons would not tamely allow the licensed victualling interest to be interfered with. So poor Mr Vialls found to his cost, and he was not even rewarded by much popularity among the lower orders, for they knew him best as a rather ill-tempered dictator, and were not easily able to recognise him in his new character of tribune of the people. The wolf may put on the sheep's skin for a praiseworthy purpose, but it is only natural that the lambs keep out of the way till they see clearly what he is after; and if any of the small boys were inclined to look favourably on this innovator, there were sounder politicians who addressed them with somewhat threadbare arguments to this effect: "Oh, you stupid fellows, what humbug this is! Do you suppose that any gifts of the enemy are free from snares? Is that all you

know about Vialls? Depend upon it he is up to some dodge or other. Don't trust the donkey. Anyhow, *timeo magistrum et dona ferentem.*" Thus there were not found wanting Conservative members of even the lower classes, who joined in drawing up a petition, or Bill of Rights, in which Mr Vialls was adjured to respect the constitution of the state, and in this matter of hampers to allow all his subjects full liberty to rob or be robbed, as the case might be. To be sure, it was afterwards discovered that this document had been signed by many junior boys under a sort of compulsion; but then it is an approved maxim, that the duty of the upper classes is to direct the political opinions of the less enlightened members of the community.

Mr Vialls was very angry when he received this petition, and in reply issued a Declaration of Independence, denouncing the severest penalties against any one who meddled with another's hamper, and threatening, in case this law were not obeyed, to blockade the ports and prevent the introduction of any more hampers into his territories. The oligarchy were furious, and then began a struggle, not unprecedented in history, a despotic monarch siding with the people against the power of the barons. But in

this instance the struggle was short, for Mr Vialls not only had justice on his side, but law; and to enforce his decrees a formidable standing army was at his full command, not to speak of powerful allies whom he could call to his aid from all quarters. Besides, he was single and firm in his purpose, whereas the enemy were many, and disunion soon began to prevail in their counsels. Before long, of six prefects in the house, three deserted the cause of their order, and with more or less heartiness professed Liberal principles upon the Hamper question. There was nothing for the others to do but to submit, and the new order of things was duly established.

One effect of these commotions was to put a temporary stop to the traffic in hampers. Between Mr Vialls and the prefects, small boys were afraid of getting into trouble, and advised their correspondents to delay all consignments of this kind till more settled times. But when the agitation had subsided, the ports were once more opened, so to speak, and, on one day a cargo of no less than three hampers arrived, and, according to the terms of the new law, were conveyed under a guard to the matron's room, there to wait the disposal of the boys to whom they were addressed. These boys were, greedy

Thomas Bredgman, unlucky Dick de Wilton, and sulky José Price. Now, it was a question of public interest, "What would they do with them?" Would the new Hamper Act be found to work? Let us trace the fate of each of these three hampers.

José Price, otherwise known as "Sulky Josh," was a queer boy. His father was a Welsh doctor, settled in South America, and his mother was a Spaniard; and in Josh the union of Welsh hot-headedness and Spanish pride had produced a countenance and character which were not prepossessing. Among the ruddy, chubby cheeks of his English schoolfellows, you could not help remarking his sallow, thin face, the expression of which was anything but pleasant, though his features were regular and well cut and he had wonderfully black eyes. The boys didn't like these black eyes, especially when they flashed with hot and sudden, and yet lasting anger, which they very often did; for José was easily offended, and though he kept away as much as he could from his companions, seldom a day passed without his having some quarrel with them. To tell the truth, they did not try very hard to make him more good-natured, but from the day that he entered the school, persisted in teasing and tormenting him,

laughing at his pride and awkwardness and ignorance of their ways. José had been to school before, in South America, but we thought it must have been a strange sort of school, for, by his account, all the boys used to carry knives and smoke cigarettes, and didn't seem to have the remotest notion of boxing or playing cricket or getting thrashed. He was now utterly miserable, and every mail wrote letters to his father insisting on being taken home, and threatening to run away or commit suicide or do something dreadful. Poor fellow ! a little sensible care and kindness might have cured him of much of his unhappy temper, and taught him to be more cheerful. But nobody took José in hand, and he became a sort of Ishmaelite—nearly everybody despised him, and he hated everybody. It might have been supposed that the arrival of a hamper from his Welsh aunt would have comforted him a little, but he did not show any signs of pleasure, and still less any desire to share its contents with his companions. He did not even open the hamper, but requested the matron to lock it up in her cupboard for the present, a thing which would have astonished us greatly if we had not long ceased to be astonished at anything which José might think fit to do.

It was more clear how Dick de Wilton would behave, for Dick was a thoroughly good-hearted fellow in his way, and his friends repaired to the matron's room as a matter of course, on hearing of his good fortune.

"Open it here, and don't let the big fellows know anything about it," suggested one prudent and interested counsellor.

But Dick shook his head. He knew that he was always unlucky, and that there would be no chance for him of securing the full enjoyment of his dainties. Besides, this Dick was a Conservative plebeian, and did not approve of Mr Vialls' interference in any department of the State. So he pulled out the two cold roast-ducks which his mother had sent him, likewise two pots of jam, and like a man bore them boldly into the dining-hall, where supper was going on.

Great excitement was caused by the appearance of these luxuries, and from all quarters Dick was appealed to by winks, nods, and gestures of entreaty or command. Only the prefects sat still in silent dignity, and pretended not to see what was causing all this commotion, and perhaps nursed in their manly hearts bitter memories of the privileges of which they had

been deprived. But Dick made haste to choose out the fatter of the two ducks, and wrapped him in a piece of newspaper, and reverentially approaching the table where these dignitaries exalted sat, made his humble and voluntary offering of that which they could no longer claim as a right. The nobles did not scruple to accept this mark of duty, but smiled graciously upon Dick, and congratulated each other that there was still hope for the welfare of the State, seeing that loyalty and reverence had not been altogether destroyed by the efforts of revolutionary and traitorous demagogues. Then they ate up the duck, and passed the bones down to the small boys.

The other duck, Dick, after slenderly helping himself and one or two friends, handed over to the tender mercies of the inferior aristocracy of the fifth form, two or three of whom were successful in fighting for it, and immediately fell upon it with such fury that in two minutes they had torn the carcase to pieces and gobbled up every bit that was eatable, though Bredgman was afterwards found to be deriving apparently great gratification from sucking the breast-bone.

Having thus propitiated the gods, Dick was free to enjoy himself on the remains, and to entertain his

contemporaries at the lower end of the table, to which purpose he devoted the two pots of jam already mentioned. And let me give Dick his due ; he was not only generous but just, insisting that everybody should have his share as far as it would go, urging greedy boys to pass the pot, and even interfering to "let Josh have some," when Price's neighbour thought fit to snatch away the turn of that unpopular boy.

José looked up in surprise for a moment when he heard Dick speak out for him, but he made no attempt to get back the jam-pot, and a sullen frown settled on his face. Generally there was a certain amount of sulkiness about Dick's own manner, but that night his heart was unusually open, and after supper he took the trouble to search out José, and press upon him one of the Ribstone pippins with which he had filled his pockets, for private consumption in bed. This was a great deal for Dick to do by way of courtesy towards the pariah of the school, and it was pure courtesy, for Dick was not remembering that Price had a hamper of his own—he was too unlucky to make any prudent speculation of this sort. Yes, it was kind of him ; and Rhadamanthus, not to say Mr Vials, might well have put it in the scale

against a dozen of poor Dick's too frequent delinquencies.

Now, what was Bredgman going to do with his hamper? That was what the boys in his dormitory wanted to know; it was a small dormitory, and the inhabitants were on very sociable and confidential terms with each other.

"It is a splendid hamper," said Bredgman. "There is a ham and sausages."

"Ah!" said one small and hungry boy, with deep interest.

"And pickled lobster."

"No!"

"Yes! and lots of nuts. What a blessing it is that these brutes of prefects aren't allowed to bag our things now!"

"So it is. But a fellow can't eat up all his hamper himself," said the former speaker, meaningly.

"Of course not. I don't intend to eat all mine. I have an idea in my head."

In time this idea came out, and proved to be a very remarkable one.

Bredgman's plan was that he should entertain all the dormitory to supper next night, and that they, for their part, should each agree to pay him sixpence

out of their Saturday's pocket-money, by way of admission to the feast.

This plan was not wholly approved, and there were not wanting reviling tongues to call Bredgman by ugly names ; but he stuck to his point, and as the rights of property had been recently established so firmly, the other fellows in the room saw no way of sharing his dainties except by agreeing to his terms. A composition, however, was effected. Fourpence, instead of sixpence, was fixed as the price of the banquet, and it was furthermore arranged that every fellow in the room should save his cheese from supper, and contribute it to the common stock. Two or three other boys from adjoining dormitories were invited on the same terms, and all were bound over to strict secrecy.

Bredgman was in high glee. He pretended that his nose was bleeding in preparation, and in this way got an opportunity of removing his hamper from the matron's room while the coast was clear, and smuggled it up-stairs, where he laid out the contents under his bed. With a hopeful heart he returned to the school-room, and spent the rest of preparation in joyfully counting up and arranging how he should spend the riches which he expected to gain from his hamper.

There would not only be the fourpences coming in, in a lump, next Saturday, but he determined to keep back the nuts, and sell them in very small penny-worths to very small boys. But after supper, while he was wondering if he should be successful in keeping all the big fellows from scenting the banquet, and trying to make up his mind whether he would buy a pound of jujubes or six sticks of chocolate to eat in church next Sunday, he was surprised by a summons to Mr Vialls' room, where, to his horror, he found his ham, sausages, pickled lobster, and so forth, arranged neatly on the table.

"Are these yours?" said the master, sternly.

They were indeed all his—all his good things, in one fell swoop, discovered and handed over to the authorities by some too vigilant eye.

"You know very well that it is strictly forbidden to take any eatables into the bedrooms. What do you mean? I have a good mind to give you a sound caning. At all events, I shall take care that these things shall be given away to persons who will make a better use of them, and you will take care that you are not reported to me again. I don't know what this school is coming to, what with greediness and disobedience!"

Poor Bredgman! Fancy his disgust; and fancy the disgust of his invited guests, who were all waiting with open mouths, expecting that he had gone for the hamper, and would presently appear. And now, when the bad tidings were broken, there arose a very nice and difficult point of law. Bredgman was found to hold that he having been prevented from performing his part of the contract by circumstances beyond his control, the other parties to the bargain were not thereby released from their obligations; in fact, that they ought to pay their fourpences all the same. If we had space to spare, it would be very curious and interesting to study the pleadings on both sides of this case; but we can only mention that Bredgman supported his view by many arguments and precedents, and that the defendants to the action said they would see him hanged first.

Confident as he was in the justice of his cause, he felt that he could not bring this suit before any tribunal which would not be prejudiced against him, so he had to resign himself to the wretched fate of losing hamper, fourpences, and all, and hearing everybody laugh at him and say it served him right.

For everybody heard about it, and the Conserva-

tive party were very indignant against both Bredgman and Mr Vialls.

"Didn't I tell you what would be the end of all these meddlings with the customs of the school? Of course, fellows like Bredgman will be encouraged to play their low, mean, sneaking, greedy tricks," said Blackburn.

"I think you ought to be kicked, Bredgman," said Cooper.

"All the same, Vialls has no business to bag his hamper. He ought to let the fellows have it," said Leeman. "First, he makes a row about us having a share in the hampers, and then he gives one away to the servants, or to some cad or other. That's justice, is it?"

"I dare say he will eat up Bredgman's grub himself."

"It's a shame, and we oughtn't to stand it."

The speakers were the three prefects who still headed the Conservative party, and looked back with regret on the good old times that had so lately passed away.

"Here's another fellow has a hamper. I think we ought to see that he doesn't keep it all to himself."

"Of course we ought. Vialls can't stop us from

trying to prevent the cubs from making greedy and selfish little beasts of themselves."

"Here, young Price! We want to know what you are going to do with your hamper."

"'Tisn't any business of yours," said José, with a flash of his bright, black eyes, and before the three prefects could recover from their amazement at his shameless audacity, he had walked off.

"What *are* the cubs coming to?"

"Did you ever see such a cheeky little brute?"

"I say, we can't stand this!"

And the end of their talk was, that these three entered into a conspiracy to set aside the new law and restore the old customs of Whitminster. The first step they took was to send one or two small boys as a deputation to the matron's room, with a view of getting hold of the hamper in question, if possible; but that functionary was a strong supporter of the recent measures of the Government, and drove forth the applicants with menaces and upbraidings. So it was found necessary to take other proceedings, and the same evening José Price was formally summoned to a sort of public assembly, held in the schoolroom, and presided over by these three prefects. The others had refused to interfere in any way. They

were ready to obey the law, but not to take any particular trouble about enforcing it.

"Look here, Price," said Blackburn, with much dignity; "we have determined to put down greediness and all that sort of thing, in the schoolhouse, and we want to know if you intend to keep your hamper all to yourself."

"Perhaps I will, and perhaps I won't," said José, looking at him full in the face, and putting on one of his ugliest looks.

"Now, none of your cheek!" cried Leeman. "Tell us openly whether you intend to give anything to the fellows? Not that the prefects care about having any of your beastly grub, but we won't let you be selfish; so you had better fetch out your hamper at once."

"Or if you don't, we'll show you something," said Cooper, carefully twisting up a strap.

Price looked still uglier, and did not say a word.

"Come, Josh, be a good fellow, and fetch out your hamper," said Leeman, trying persuasion.

"I won't," blazed out José, with a stamp of his foot on the floor. "You can't make me. You shan't!"

"Oh! we'll see about that," said Cooper, stepping forward with his instrument of torture in his hand.

"Stand clear, you fellows! Just hold him tight, somebody"

But nobody seemed inclined to undertake this task, for José looked like a young tiger-cub ready to spring, and the fellows who stood nearest him were quite frightened by the expression of his face.

"Never mind! I can manage," said Cooper, raising the strap.

We all looked on breathless, wondering what would happen next. We had put down José as a coward, and expected to find him crying and writhing and begging for mercy; but, to our astonishment, he turned round quietly, folded his arms, and stood Cooper's thrashing without moving or making a sound.

"Eighteen—nineteen—twenty. There! haven't you had enough yet, you stubborn young devil?" said Cooper, stopping to take breath.

"Shut up, Cooper," said Blackburn, who was very conscientious, and always rebuked bad language.

"Well, isn't it enough to make any one swear to have to do with such a—— Are you going to give in?"

José only looked at him—such a look!

"Well, here goes again."

"Give him another chance," said Blackburn, as the strap again descended on José's shoulders. "Come, Price, there's no good in being so obstinate."

"Oh! you might as well talk to a stone wall," cried Cooper, beginning to flog away with new vigour. "I'll make him speak presently."

"No, no! he's had enough," murmured some voices.

"Better stop," said Leeman, aside. "You'll hurt him, if you don't look out."

"Very well! That will do for to-night, but to-morrow night you shall have the same if you don't fetch out your hamper. Will you remember that?"

"You shall see if I remember," muttered José, in a voice full of suppressed passion, and was moving quickly to the door.

"Stop him! Shut the door!" cried Cooper. "He's going to tell Vials."

"I say, Price, you are surely not going to be such a sneak," said Leeman.

"If you do say a single word to any of the masters, you'll be half killed, and none of the fellows will ever speak to you again."

"I don't want ever to speak to them again," burst out José, and suddenly gave way to a loud and passionate fit of crying.

"Come, come! don't take on so," said Leeman, trying to comfort him. "You stood the licking awfully well, and you know it was all your own fault."

"Keep the door fast shut," said Cooper. "He is crying so loud on purpose, because he hopes somebody will hear him, and we shall get into a scrape."

"No, no! he will soon get over it," said Blackburn, trying to comfort the poor fellow. "But, Price, I hope you will change your mind before to-morrow night, for we shall have to punish you again if you don't do as we wish you."

"Let him keep his hamper to himself, if he is so determined about," proposed somebody of a less firm disposition than the leader of the Conservatives, and somebody else from the back of the room called out, "It's a shame!"

"Who said it was a shame?" roared Cooper, wrathfully catching up his strap. "Was that you, young Wood?"

"No, Cooper; no, it wasn't me. It was young Prior."

"Me! What a lie!"

"Well, just you look out that I don't find the fellow, or I'll teach him to say that it is a shame."

In the meanwhile Price had gone to the lavatory, where he was followed by most of the fellows of his

own standing in the house. As generally happens, the persecution he had suffered had raised the popular feeling in his favour, and he found himself the object of more sympathy than he had experienced at any period of his school-life. Dick de Wilton offered him a nut; Abbing proposed that he should take off his jacket and examine his injuries; and Bredgman strongly urged him to give up his hamper to the authorities. But he did not seem to care for these marks of friendliness, and when his angry sobs had died away, they gave place to a settled sullenness in which nobody could get a single word out of him.

"I never saw anybody in such a wax as Guy," said Prior, next day. Now it must be known that "Guy Fawkes" was a nickname given to José on the Fifth of November after his arrival.

"He's mad," was the opinion of the boy Prior was talking to.

Everybody was very curious to know what would be the end of it. Would Price give in, and would the prefects carry out their threats? To tell the truth, the counsels of that august body were far from being unanimous. The three supporters of the Government strongly urged their Nonconformist colleagues to consider their course, though they still

abstained from interfering ; and even the latter three were of different opinions. Cooper thought that the best thing to do would be to give Price another thrashing, and then drop the matter altogether. Leeman urged that this would only make him more obstinate, but that if their request were put as a matter of favour, they might be able to win him over to their wishes and taste his jam. But Blackburn, who cared less for jam than for principle, insisted that justice ought to take its course with the heretic ; and his influence was so strong, that next evening the solemn conclave was again assembled, and Price was once more put to the question.

“ Do you intend to open your hamper ? ”

“ Yes,” he muttered.

“ When will you open it ? At supper ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ And will you give the fellows some of your things ? ” asked Cooper, handling his strap.

“ Yes.”

“ That’s all right ! I knew you would be sensible after all,” said Leeman.

“ I am sorry you didn’t agree to our wishes before, and escape the punishment you have suffered,” said Blackburn, magisterially.

"Don't you think we ought to make him promise not to tell?" said Cooper, who seemed disappointed that the strap was not likely to be called into requisition.

"No, no! He won't think of such a thing; will you, Guy?"

"No," muttered Price.

"Of course not," said Leeman.

"Remember, you bring your grub to me, and I'll see that none of the fellows put upon you."

Cooper's services as executioner were not called into requisition, for at supper-time Price fulfilled his promise by appearing with a great jar of preserves; none of your vulgar raspberry or strawberry jams, but a dark, rich, sweet, sticky jelly, made from some luscious fruit that had ripened under tropical suns. With this he marched up to the top of the table, and banged it down before Blackburn without a word.

"There! that will do," said Blackburn. "I don't want any of your stuff; give it to the cubs."

"Stop," said Leeman, "let's just taste this wonderful jam that such a row has been made about. I should like to see what it's like."

And the big fellows proceeded to help themselves from the jar, and then shoved it down the table, but

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there was not much left when it came the length of Price's contemporaries. Indeed, Bredgman was almost the only small boy who secured a taste, by diligently cleaning out the pot and licking the cover. As a mark of great favour, Leeman spread some on a piece of bread, and sent it to Dick de Wilton; but before the latter had taken a bite out of it, Price astonished him by running up and snatching it out of his hand.

"Well, that's cool!" said Dick.

"You shan't have any," declared Price, in an excited way.

"You *are* a shabby fellow! Didn't I give you some of mine?" and Dick was about to repossess himself of his prize, when Price settled the matter by throwing it into the fire.

"He's quite mad!" was the opinion of all who witnessed José's strange behaviour; but there was a cry of "Hush! hush!" and Mr Vialls appeared to read prayers.

Prayers were over, the small boys had retired to bed, and the prefects were occupied in study, or otherwise, in their studies, when they were roused by tidings of a disaster. Half-a-dozen "cubs" were knocking at the door of one of these sanctums.

"Leeman! Leeman! Price has run away!"

"Run away!" cried Leeman, bouncing out of his study into the passage, where he was soon joined by some of the other prefects. "How do you know?"

"Why he walked coolly out of the front door just after supper. He told young Wood we should never see him again."

"Here's a nice go!"

"Go to bed, you small boys, and we'll see about it."

"I say," remarked Charteris, one of the prefects who had not taken part in persecuting Price, "I told you, Cooper, you were bullying that fellow past all bearing."

"It was his own fault."

"Anyhow, I should advise you to have him looked after at once, for if he gets off, you will come in for a row. Go and tell Vialls at once, and make the best story you can for yourselves."

"We shall tell him the whole truth. We only did our duty," said Blackburn.

"Hang it! why should we tell him? Let him find out."

"No, Leeman. Depend upon it, if Price gets clear off, it will be the worse for you. Better see about it at once."

"Well, come on, and we'll tell him. Cooper, you had most to do with it, you ought to tell."

"I can't," said Cooper. "Do you know, I feel awfully seedy?"

"I feel rather sick, too. That jelly was beastly rich stuff. I believe it hasn't agreed with me. I wish we had never meddled with it."

"It has left a horrid taste in my mouth," declared Charteris. "But come on, I'll go with you to Vialls, if you like."

And the end of it was that, after a little delay, all the prefects except Cooper repaired to Mr Vialls' room. They found the master wearied and worried after a hard day's work, and in a very bad humour.

"What's the matter?" he asked, sharply, as this deputation appeared before him, and stood evidently ill at ease.

"We are afraid, sir, that young Price has run away."

"Run away!" cried Mr Vialls, jumping up. "When — where — why? How did this happen? What have you been doing to this boy, Leeman?"

There was no answer, but Leeman looked very pale.

"You have been ill-using him, I see it plainly. Tell me at once, Leeman!"

"Please, sir, I don't feel very well," stammered

Leeman, and without another word, opened the door and ran away

“Will you tell me, then, Charteris?”

“I don’t feel very well,” replied Charteris, in a troubled voice, and followed Leeman’s retreat.

“What is the meaning of this?” roared Mr Vialls. “Blaney, will you have the goodness to explain to me?”

“I don’t feel well either, sir,” faltered Blaney, and staggered out of the room after the other two.

This was too much for Mr Vialls’ patience. With an angry exclamation, he gave chase, and followed the fugitives into the matron’s room, where he found about a dozen boys in various stages of undress and sickness. Mr Vialls cast a glance on the white faces, covered with perspiration; nor were other very plain signs absent.

“What is the meaning of this? You have all been smoking!”

“No, sir; I don’t think it is that,” interposed the matron, who was looking quite frightened. “They have all been taken this way since supper, and it beats me to understand it; I never saw such sickness.”

“What did you eat at supper?”

“Nothing, sir; nothing unusual at least, except”——

"Except what?"

"They had some preserves out of Master Price's hamper," said the matron.

"Oh!" said Mr Vialls, very significantly. "After all I have said, Leeman!"

But Leeman was in no condition to be scolded, for at that moment he fairly dropped on the floor. Mr Vialls knew something of medicine. He stooped down, felt the boy's pulse, and looked anxious.

"Let me look at this hamper, Mrs Bramble."

The matron produced a basket in which were packed three or four jars of preserves. There was an empty space from which one had been taken out, and in it lay a small paper package labelled "*Tartar Emetic*." Mr Vialls read the label, started, and whispered something to Mrs Bramble, who screamed outright—

"Poison!"

"Hold your tongue!" cried Mr Vialls. "Send out for the doctor as quick as possible. In the meanwhile mix some mustard in hot water. Make some strong tea. The paper is almost full still, so there can't have been much harm done. But not a moment should be lost. Don't be afraid, boys. You must have taken a small dose of poison; but, thank Heaven, not

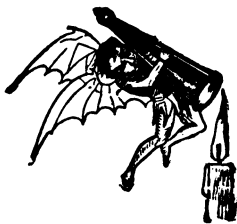
enough to kill you. Do as I tell you, and we will hear all about it afterwards."

My readers do not require to learn what Mr Vialls heard. It was a bad business; and, when once the alarm and commotion had subsided, the whole matter was hushed up as much as possible, so I will say as little more about it as need be. Both Price and his persecutors had reason to be thankful that the consequences were not so fatally serious as they might have been.

None of us ever saw poor José again. The unhappy boy was soon heard of as having arrived at an uncle's house, and was, I believe, shipped off at once to South America. Whether he had been aware of the full extent of the dreadful crime he had come so near committing, I do not know. Nor do I know what passed between Mr Vialls and the upper boys when they had recovered from the effects of the tartar emetic. One thing I do know is, that from that day the small fellows' rights of property in hampers were scrupulously respected.

Some years afterwards, when the new custom had grown into an old one, the most conservative of prefects would have been the first to put down any

one interfering with these rights. But good Catholics and Protestants do not much respect the memory of either Guy Fawkes or Titus Oates; and to José Price no monument was erected by the friends of freedom.



THE MISFORTUNES OF AN
ELEVEN.



THE MISFORTUNES OF AN ELEVEN.

SING, O Muse, the misfortunes of a Cricket Eleven, and tell how the prowess of many heroes was prevented by untimely fate !

The second paragraph of this epic narrative must of course contain the catalogue of the Eleven, many of them not unknown to fame. First we name Catesby, skilled to hurl the flying ball and to strike terror into the hearts and destruction into the wickets of his adversaries. But rather should we have first celebrated Dixon, whom the rest obeyed as captain. Next, let the praise be sung of Sargent, lord of the far-striking bat, and pugilistic champion of the Minster Green. Him the butcher boys; him "the Coppers," our scholastic rivals; him the boldest of his own school-fellows respect and avoid, so great is the dread of that

stalwart arm and that dauntless eye. Then come, from their home in the High Street, the two brothers Bryant, Harry and Bill to wit, in jesting language of school wags known as H. B. and B. B. From the schoolhouse, the ranks are swelled by cautious Cane, and pugnacious Prior, and bold Beesley; and the poetic Phillips is not absent, his literary talents recommending him for the post of scorer. Nor shall we omit to mention Billy Elder, smallest and most active of longstops; nor yet Thomson, quick at catches and slow at studies, not less the plague of spooning batters than of painstaking pedagogues. If the attentive reader will now take a slate and reckon up this list, he will find only one name wanting to complete the tale of our array. Who that one was, I leave him to guess.

We were the Second Eleven of Whitminster School, and a match had been arranged between us and the boys of the Grammar School at Brinsmouth, a small town about twenty-five miles distant. It was not only our first match of the season, but the first match in which many of us had been trusted to maintain the credit of our school away from home. So we looked forward to the appointed day with great interest and excitement, and hoped it would be fine,

and thought of pleasure, and honour, and liberty, and eating and drinking, and something else.

It will have been noticed by the observant in such matters, that in schools, as in other communities, there will be at times a run upon a certain pursuit, occupation, or amusement, which has somehow or other become the fashion, and which will be followed eagerly by the general herd of boys, till either they grow tired of it, or it is superseded by some new object of public interest. Thus I have seen collections of stamps, crests, seals, eggs, and fossils, become fashionable at different periods. Or, again, everybody would take to making nets or boats, or watchspring guns, or catapults, or darts, or toffee. Then, perhaps, the whole school would go wild about keeping silkworms, or white mice, or rabbits; and you might at a certain season find that nearly everybody had taken to fishing, and that bats and balls were almost entirely deserted for rods and lines. Or, perhaps, it might be bathing that would engross our affections; or there might be a rage for playing at some minor game, such as chevy-chase. At the time of which I write, we had all gone wild about—smoking.

For the most part, this form of dissipation in schools is, or was, happily confined to a small set of boys;

but now the idea seemed to have spread among us that the highest mark of manliness was a black clay pipe, and that, failing the ability to attain to this, a cigar would still confer distinction upon its possessor or possessors; two or three impecunious urchins not unfrequently clubbing together for the purchase of such a luxury. I say *distinction*, for I don't think there was much pleasure in the performance to most of us. But be that as it may, you might have seen small boys making their chubby cheeks pale with the fumes of the tobacco-tinted cabbage, and have heard the most ignorant of us discussing knowingly the relative merits of meerschaums and manillas. I say, you *might* have seen and heard, for, if you were a master, or other suspicious character, the probability is that you would have seen and heard no such thing, as of course we took good care that this proof of manliness should be exhibited somewhat on the sly. Still, it will be remembered that there is another sense to which the practice of smoking appeals, and thus we found ourselves not altogether able to secure the secrecy which was to be desired under the circumstances. Then Mr Vialls and his cane came into operation; and so vigilant and effectual was their counteracting influence, that the new fashion was

speedily found to be one involving considerable danger. Thus our love for smoking was restrained, but by no means extinguished; and we hailed a cricket-match, or any such outing, as an opportunity of indulging safely in something that was both fashionable and forbidden. Ah! how often have we reason to laugh at the folly of boys and men. But how can we laugh when we have found out where that road leads upon which folly too often guides fools of all ages!

Such being the state of things, it befell that, the evening before we were to go to Brinsmouth, Phillips encountered a dark, black-whiskered and generally ruffian-looking stranger, who mysteriously introduced himself as a smuggler, and thereby sent a thrill of awe through Jemima's romantic mind. To be brief, this adventurous individual professed to have smuggled from Spain a quantity of the finest tobacco, and, as it had never paid duty, he was able to offer Phillips a cake of it for the paltry sum of eighteen-pence. Jemima's grandmother had sent him five shillings that very day, so he eagerly closed with the bargain, and bound himself to secrecy.

"The police are after me," said the stranger, in a hoarse whisper; and Phillips did not know whether to

feel more proud or more frightened about his dealings with such a dangerous character.

But he showed nothing but pride when he exhibited to us his new acquisition; and we looked upon it with admiration, and promised ourselves on the morrow the satisfaction of not only setting the laws of Mr Vialls, but of Her Majesty's customs, at defiance. The fact was, that Phillips' friend was no more a smuggler than he was himself—nothing but an ordinary commonplace bad character, half poacher and half beggar; and his wonderful tobacco was the vilest twist that was ever manufactured for the delectation of strong-stomached navvies; but then, not even a taste for smoking will give a silly schoolboy to understand the ways of the world.

The morning of the match dawned bright and calm, and, in the highest possible spirits, we arrayed ourselves in our uniform—white trousers, red shirts, and red-and-black striped caps—and set out, determined to beat our opponents if possible, and, at all events, to enjoy ourselves to the utmost. Didn't the other fellows, condemned to a morning of Euclid and Virgil, envy us? and didn't we pity them?

Arrived at the station, our first thought was to prove our independence and assert our rights as men and

Britons by having something to eat. So, though we had just breakfasted, and were to arrive at our destination in not much more than an hour, we proceeded to indulge in a little light refreshment in the shape of pork-pies and beer, and furthermore provided ourselves with a few sausage rolls and such like trifles, in case of being attacked by hunger on the way. Sargent, who was the wildest of the party, proposed that we should also take some brandy. The rest of us were not displeased by the idea, though we rather shrank from such a bold step into dissipation ; so we compromised by purchasing a bottle of ginger-cordial, and felt that we were indeed about to see life.

In due time we took our seats at one end of a third-class carriage, which, as we remarked loudly to each other, was, after all, more airy than the second class, and just as comfortable for a short journey. The fact was, that we had been furnished with second-class fare, but had seen fit to go by a cheaper carriage and to appropriate the difference to the purchase of such luxuries as have been above mentioned. I am afraid we did not think much of such little trickeries ; I hope our successors at Whitminster are more honourable.

Our only companions in the carriage were a couple of young farmers, and an old Quaker, the chief feature

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in whose appearance was a hat of enormous size and antique fashion. The young men seemed to sympathise with our high spirits, for they grinned and looked jolly in response to our laughing talk and not over civil stares ; but the Quaker did not appear particularly glad of our company, for he held himself erect, looked forbidding, and shrank into a corner, keeping in front of him a singularly large and shabby umbrella by way of defensive weapon, as it were, against any attack which we might feel inclined to make on him. He was evidently one of the timid people who have a strange prejudice against these quietest and most gentle of creatures, schoolboys. Nor did he look better pleased when Elder, who was by way of being a wit, began in a very audible voice to ask Sargent what sort of hats people wore in Noah's ark.

"Awful looking affairs" replied Sargent. "It would take you a day and a half to walk round one of them, and you would have to sit down on the rim to rest every half hour or so."

"But that was nothing to their umbrellas," said Thompson, taking up the joke. "Some of the old-fashioned umbrellas are still used by country people, and they often bring a dozen chickens to market inside one of them."

At this we tittered, and the young farmers gave a loud guffaw, and the old gentleman was very much disconcerted, and made an attempt to move into another carriage. But it was too late ; the porter was running along the platform, shutting the doors, and the train began to move off ; so old Ephraim, as we at once nicknamed him, retired into his corner and resolved to make the best of it.

But we were not to start without a slight delay. Elder happened to look out of the window, and beheld an old lady who, surrounded by about half-a-dozen small children of both sexes, was standing on the platform and jealously guarding a large trunk and two bandboxes with vigilant eye and upraised parasol. For a moment she looked away as we began to move off, and then Elder shouted to a porter and pointed to the old lady's box, making vehement gesticulations of grief and alarm, as if this were his luggage being left behind. The porter caught up the box and ran alongside of the train with it, trying to push it into the guard's van. The old lady perceived this just in time, and rushed after him with loud and angry remonstrances. Her whole brood of youngsters trotted in pursuit of her, raising loud wails at the prospect of being abandoned in this strange and

bewildering scene to the mercies of an engine which was coming up whistling and puffing like a very Bogey. Two of them caught their grandmother by the gown and retarded her progress ; two of them fell flat on their noses and wept bitterly ; one of them got lost in the crowd, and cried louder than ever, and one fairly tumbled over on the rails, thereby causing a dozen ladies to shriek and half-a-dozen gentlemen to rush to the rescue, and half-a-dozen more to yell out to the driver of the approaching engine, which pulled up with an angry snort and a creaking enough to set your teeth on edge.

The commotion at the station may be imagined ; and the end of it was that the train just started was stopped, the old lady's box was rescued, her flock was also collected, counted, and restored to her, and the guard came and scolded us in no mild language for causing so much trouble and alarm. After that we proceeded on our way.

We were pleased to laugh and to treat the guard's remonstrances with contempt, and our young fellow travellers encouraged us to think that we had been doing a very fine thing ; but I don't laugh now at such folly, or, if a smile will come when one thinks of the absurdity of the scene, I confess it would have

served us right if somebody had given us a good hiding to teach us consideration for the feelings of others and respect for old age—two virtues in which schoolboys of present as of past days are too often deficient.

Away we went rattling through the woods and hedgerows of that pretty midland county, bright with the fresh greenness of spring, which seemed greener and brighter as in our minds we contrasted them with the dusty schoolrooms from which for once we found ourselves set free. And before we had gone far, we must needs prove our freedom by pulling out pipes and beginning to smoke Phillips' smuggled tobacco. Two or three fellows, willing, but yet afraid, to go this length in manliness, confined themselves to mild cigarettes, previously purchased for the occasion at thirteen for sixpence ; and two or three more, for one reason or another, did not indulge at all. But soon there were quite enough fellows puffing at coarse and strong tobacco to make the atmosphere of the carriage decidedly unpleasant ; and the old Quaker attempted to interfere.

"Dost thou not know that smoking is forbidden by the regulations of the railway company ?" he said, mildly.

Little Elder, to whom this remark was addressed, vouchsafed no other answer to it than an impudent stare, and the rest of us tittered at the formal and old-fashioned way in which the Quaker spoke. Only Dixon, who was not smoking himself, ventured on a remonstrance.

"I say, you had better drop it," he whispered. "No use of getting into a row."

But Dixon was one of those cold-blooded, easy-going fellows who have not much influence among boys, and we did not mind him. Then the Quaker spoke again and touched a tender point.

"My young friends, this practice must be as hurtful to children as it is disagreeable to their elders. Thou mayst laugh, but I assure thee that thou wilt do thyself great harm by smoking so young."

We weren't going to stand this; and Elder, who felt himself especially affronted, made a face at his would-be monitor, and puffed away more vigorously than ever.

"Wilt thee shut up, and mind thou's own business?" cried Beesley.

"Have a cigar, Ephraim?" said Thomson, and there was a roar of laughter.

"Is thee afraid we will set thee's hat on fire?" added Cane, trying to contribute his share of wit.

The Quaker made no further remonstrance, but very deliberately put on his spectacles, opened a newspaper, and subsided into his corner, paying no more attention to the jokes which we went on to cut upon him, with the aid and approval of the young farmers, who now moved over to our side of the carriage, and accepting some of Phillips' tobacco, joined us in having a pipe ; and we all began to be very friendly together. One or two of us certainly did stop smoking at this time, either to oblige the old gentleman, or to avoid getting into trouble, or for other reasons which can be better felt than described. But most of the party thought themselves bound to go on, and did go on as long as they could, which was not long. Our previous attempts had for the most part been of a very elementary nature. Perhaps Sargent was the only one of us who had ever before smoked a pipe of strong tobacco right through. So our friend the Quaker was soon avenged.

Long before we reached Renchester Junction, the first station at which we were to stop, most of the fellows had one by one laid aside their pipes, and announced that they were not going to have any more "just now."

"I have heard that smoking makes your hand

shake, and perhaps, we shall spoil our play," said Cane.

"I don't like smoking a new pipe," said Beesley.

"What beastly stuff that ginger-cordial was! It has made me feel quite ill," said Harry Bryant.

"How hot it is! I wish I could get some water," said Elder.

"These third-class carriages are always stuffy," said Thomson.

"There is a smell in them enough to make anybody sick," said Phillips.

"Hadn't we better open all the windows? It feels so close," said Prior.

When the train slackened speed on approaching the Junction, Sargent was the only one of the eleven who continued to puff like a practised man of the world. The rest of us began to talk about making a rush for the refreshment-room to get a glass of water.

"Don't, you donkeys," urged Dixon, the responsibility of his duties as captain rousing him to energy. "We only stop a minute or two, and you are sure to lose the train."

"Oh, no! We shan't be more than a minute."

"Well, look sharp, for any sake."

By this time the train had drawn up in the station.

where two or three other trains were waiting to start, or had just arrived, and the platform was crowded with people. A review was being held that day on Renchester Common, and there was an unusual bustle and commotion at the Junction.

Four of our party remained in the carriage; the rest got out and made for the refreshment-room, the locality of which was not unknown to us.

But the refreshment-room was full, and we could find no one to attend to us, even if our mission had not been to beg a boon in charity, rather than to make a purchase with ready money. Only Phillips, by virtue, no doubt, of the unusually pale and interesting look which had spread over his face, succeeded in obtaining a glass of water at the hands of one of the attendant nymphs, whose image he is believed to have thereafter enshrined in his heart, and preserved in sweet verses. The rest were obliged to turn away disappointed.

"We can't wait. The train will be off without us. Come on, man."

"Oh! wait a moment," cried Elder. "I don't feel well. Stay with me, Prior, like a good fellow."

"We musn't wait a minute, man. Do come on!"

"I can't. Oh, I feel so ill! It must have been

that pork-pie. I am going to be sick. Do stay with me!"

But there was a bewildering clamour of bells and whistles, and shouts of "Take your seats, gentlemen!" and we durst not delay. Prior and Bryant caught Elder by the arm, and tried to drag him along; but he really looked so ill, that they gave up the attempt, and not knowing what to do, abandoned him to our friend the Quaker, who just then appeared sedately walking along, hat, umbrella, newspaper, and all, and stopped to inquire what was the matter with our companion.

"We can't wait for him. Is the train off? This way! No—here! There's the guard. Where's our carriage? Oh, you fellows, look sharp! Here we are! Get into this one."

And just in time we reached the train, and jumped into an empty compartment in the front part of it. The train moved off before we were fairly settled, a porter ran after the carriage and shut the door, and there we were.

"I say, what will Elder do? Dixon has all the tickets in his pocket."

"Oh! I dare say he will have money enough to take him back; or perhaps he will come on after us."

"What shall we do without him? That's the worst of it."

"Never mind. He's no great loss. Phillips must play for us, that's all."

"I haven't got my cricketing things," said Phillips, who had a great regard for appearances. "And, do you know, I feel rather seedy to-day. I don't think I shall be able to do much."

"You never can do much," said Cane, crossly; "but you must do your best. Hang that fellow, Elder, going and getting sick!"

"Indeed, Cane, you don't look very well yourself;" and he didn't.

"Me! I'm all right. At least I should be if I could only get some water. You look bad, Bryant, if you like!"

"Well, I don't feel all right. Do you know, I believe it is a bad thing to smoke after eating pork-pies. I wish we had thought of that."

"Oh! it isn't that. It must have been the ginger-wine. I am sure there was something the matter with it; it tasted horrible."

"Perhaps the thunder on Sunday had turned it sour," suggested Phillips.

"Hallo! Beesley, you are not going to be sick?"

"No, I think not. I shall be all right presently. But open that window, please," gasped Beesley.

"Oh, I wish we could have got some water!" said Bill Bryant, feelingly; and we sympathised with him.

"I say, these other fellows won't know what has become of us," suggested Cane, after a pause. "They'll think we have got left behind, too."

"I dare say they saw that we got into another part of the train."

"It's all right. We'll go to them at the next station. This train stops at every station, once it has passed Renchester."

"Does it?" exclaimed Prior, as just then we dashed past a small country station, and hurried on without stopping.

"I say, what station is that?" cried Cane. "Surely this isn't the way to Brinsmouth."

"No, this is the line to Coleby. I declare, you fellows, *we have got into the wrong train!*"

"No!"

"Yes, indeed. They divide it into two parts at Renchester."

Then we remembered, too late, that only the latter half of the Whitminster train went to Brinsmouth, and that the front carriages were generally attached

to the trains on the main line. So, here we were, separated from our companions, without tickets or money, bowling away at the rate of forty miles an hour at the tail of the northern express, which, for all we knew, might not stop till it had put two or three counties between us and Whitminster. Here was an unpleasant predicament; and I believe I do not exaggerate in saying, that when we discovered it, we all looked pale.

Now ensued a scene of mutual wrath and recrimination. Each of us was disgusted, in more than one sense. Each of us knew that he himself was to blame. Each of us was inclined to reproach his neighbour.

"It was all your fault. Why did you propose to get out of the train?"

"No, it was yours. You made us get into the wrong carriage."

"Well, but we should have had plenty of time if Prior hadn't stopped bothering with that stupid Elder."

"Oh, that's good! He didn't keep us more than half a second. I tell you what it is, Phillips, I wish you were hung for bringing that horrid bad tobacco. You have made us all ill."

"Well, I didn't want to make you ill," groaned Phillips, whose ghastly countenance showed him to be sincere."

"At all events, Bill, you proposed that Dixon should keep all the tickets," said Harry Bryant.

"What are we to do?" asked B. B., in tones of the utmost wretchedness.

"Let me get at the window," replied Prior, and the same idea seemed to occur to all of us.

And now let us drop a veil on what happened next. Enough, that the scene was a truly painful one, and that more than one of us suffered a punishment beyond the power of any pedagogue to inflict. How glad we were that no one else was in the carriage! But we were sorely uneasy when we thought of the train stopping, and of our reckoning with the railroad officials.

At length we were relieved on that score. The train slackened speed as it approached Coleby, a town not beyond the limits of our acquaintance, though a good way, we knew, from Whitminster. The ticket-collector came round, and when we had explained our plight to him, called the guard, who was very angry when he heard our story, and saw sundry proofs of its truth upon the side of the carriage.

He was the same guard who had already found fault with us, and this time he gave us his mind in more forcible terms ; and, so far from laughing at him, we did not open our mouths, but took his rebukes as meekly as if he had been Mr Vialls himself. Finally, when we reached the station, he committed us to the charge of a porter, to be conducted to the stationmaster, who, he said, would settle us.

We took this vague threat for a more real one than it was probably meant to be ; and, not knowing what penalty we had rendered ourselves liable to, supposed that we were being sent to the stationmaster to be punished in some way. Even if we had been more familiar with the ways of railway officials, our spirits, it will be remembered, were sorely depressed. After humbling ourselves before the guard, we feared to face the more exalted functionary. So we held a whispered consultation, the result of which was, that while the porter who had us in charge was otherwise engaged for the moment, we improved the occasion by running away, and never stopped till we had got at least half a mile from the railway. If we had gone to the stationmaster, we should probably have been scolded a little for our carelessness, and laughed at a little for our silliness, and then sent com-

fortably home on the first opportunity ; but we didn't know that.

We took refuge in a little meadow, just outside of the town, by the river-side. Here we lay down and tried to recover our strength and spirits. At first most of us were too wretched to care for what was to be done next ; but soon Harry Bryant, who had been less affected than the rest, volunteered to go into the town and reconnoitre.

In about half-an-hour he returned, bringing the report that we were twenty-five miles from Whitminster, and almost as far from Brinsmouth, and that there was no train to either place till late in the afternoon—even if we had had money to buy tickets !

What was to be done ? We clubbed together all our available resources ; but among us we could only muster sevenpence halfpenny in money, a few fragments of pork-pie, sausage rolls, and such like dainties, and Phillips' tobacco, which last article of provision was, by unanimous consent, about to be chucked into the river, when Prior very sensibly suggested that it might be kept and turned to account on the journey in the way of barter for some more wholesome form of nourishment.

Was there no one in Coleby to whom we could

appeal for help? Prior thought he knew a clergyman there, but, on being pressed, confessed that he had forgotten his name, and was not quite sure whether he did live in Coleby. To apply to the stationmaster now was out of the question, though, when we came to think of it, we felt inclined to regret that we had not thrown ourselves upon his mercy. There were, so far as we knew, no other means of public conveyance between Whitminster and Coleby. As things stood, there was nothing for it but to walk home.

"It is only about half-past twelve now," said Cane. "If we walk four miles an hour, we can be home by seven."

So this was agreed upon. One of us went into the town to lay out our disposable capital upon the biggest and most nourishing kind of biscuits that could be had for the money. We did not feel inclined to eat just yet, but we shared the biscuits among us, and put them away in our pockets. Before setting out, we refreshed ourselves by a bathe in the river, and felt very much the better for it. Then we girded up the loins of our minds, and addressed ourselves to the long tramp that lay before us.

A long and weary tramp it was! English school-boys, however agile and strong in other ways, are not,

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as a rule, fond of or practised in pedestrian exercise ; and I doubt if one of us had ever walked twenty miles in his life, even under the most favourable circumstances. Now the circumstances were all singularly unfavourable. Our stomachs had not yet ceased to feel squeamish, and if our appetites had been in a sound state, we had no food but hard and dry biscuits. The way was dreadfully monotonous and uninteresting ; long stretches of dusty turnpike, through level fields, over sluggish canals and weed-grown brooks that looked like ditches, past snug farms and cottages, the inhabitants of which seemed so provokingly comfortable and happy, and so careless of our discomfort. There were not many foot-travellers at that time of day ; everybody who passed had his gig or his market cart, in which, however, he never thought of offering us a lift. We were not cheered by the usual gaiety of schoolboys ; each of us was more or less disgusted with himself, and sullen towards his companions. The sun, too, had disappeared ; the sky had changed to a dull cheerless grey ; yet the air was close and sultry for the time of year ; and at the end of our journey we had to expect no warm and kindly welcome, but nothing less than ridicule and disgrace.

Sunt lachrymæ rerum.

So we tramped on slowly and sulkily, and every one we met turned round to stare at the seven dusty figures arrayed in white flannel, who, with downcast faces and heavy feet, were wending their weary way towards the tower of the old Minster, seen clearly from a distance of twenty miles. No one who saw us now would have guessed that we were the same doughty champions who had set out in the morning so lively and confident and impudent. "Where be your gibes now? your gambols, your songs, your flashes of merriment? Not one now to mock your own grinning? Quite chap-fallen?" Thus, with justice, might the guard and the Quaker, victims of our high spirits, have reproached us, and not a word in reply should we now have had the spirit to speak.

Cane's four miles an hour proved a delusion. We did not keep up that pace for more than half-an-hour; and after the first seven or eight miles, most of us began to feel tired and footsore, and it was necessary more than once to sit down and rest. Indeed, we had not gone half way when Phillips announced that he could not stir another step, and we had great difficulty in persuading him to pluck up spirit and try again. By this time our biscuits were all eaten, but we managed to barter Phillips' tobacco at a cottage

by the wayside for as much bread and cheese as gave us a mouthful all round. Without becoming beggars we could get no more food. Bryant proposed that we should pawn our waistcoats, after the example of the renowned David Copperfield ; but, for all we knew, there was not a pawnbroker's shop within twenty miles of us, so this proposition could scarcely be called a practical one.

On, on we went, growing more tired and miserable at every step ; and when the sun had set, we were not yet in sight of any of the familiar objects that might spur us on by showing that we were within reach of our journey's end. It was already beginning to grow dark when we found ourselves at a spot where two roads met, and there arose a dispute as to which of them we should take.

"I tell you we must go to the right," urged Cane. "I saw the Minster a few minutes ago, and it was over in that direction. Now it is hid behind that hill."

"I am sure this other road looks more like the turnpike," objected Prior.

"No, it doesn't. I tell you my father is clerk of the roads in our county, and I know more about roads than you."

"Oh, yes! according to your account, you know more about everything than everybody."

"Well, if you know best, go your own road. But any fellows who have sense will come with me."

"No, I won't. Whatever we do, we mustn't separate. Let us go your way, and ask somebody if we are right."

So we took the road to the right, and before long encountered an aged and unintelligent native, who looked hard at us, and grinned feebly.

"Is this the way to Whitminster, my man?" asked Cane, with as grand an air as he could command.

"Surely, sir. It's fine for the crops," mumbled the patriarch in reply.

"You don't understand me. Is—this—the—way—to Whitminster?" bawled Cane.

"Surely, sir, surely," was the reply.

"There! I told you so."

"How far is it?" asked Prior.

"Surely, sir, surely," and the old man grinned again, as if pleased with his powers of conversation.

"Is this the road to Jericho?" roared Bryant.

"Surely, surely, sir."

We turned away in disgust, and left the old gentle-

man grinning amicably. It was evident that he scarcely knew what he was saying, and still less what we were saying, and we looked about for some one else of whom to inquire our way. But no one was to be seen ; there was not a single house in sight. We were leaving the rich and populous plain, and climbing up a hill which, as we advanced, was found to be more and more wild and uncultivated. The road, too, by which we had come so far, was losing its character as a respectable road, and becoming more like a mere cart-track overgrown with grass. This convinced us that we had come the wrong way. But Cane was still obstinate.

“Just come a little further on, and you will see the road getting better. I am sure this must be a short cut, at all events.”

“I am sure you know nothing about it, at all events.”

“Well, only come a few steps. Perhaps we shall see a house.”

A few steps brought us to the end of our road, and we found ourselves standing, as far as we could see by the dim light, upon a wide open space, covered with furze bushes and rushes.

“Here’s a nice mess you have made of it !” declared Prior. “Why, this must be Renchester Common.”

"Well, we ought to cross Renchester Common on our way to Whitminster," persisted Cane.

"In the dark! Thank you! I have no fancy for losing my way and staying here all night. I vote we go back to the other road as fast as we can."

"O Cane! you are a brute for bringing us here," said Phillips, half crying. "I don't believe I shall be able to go on."

"Never say die, Jemima," said Harry Bryant, patting him on the back. "You'll be all right after a bit of a rest. But, upon my honour, Cane, it's too bad of you to pretend you knew all about it, and lead us ever so far out of our way;" and we all joined in the same chorus, glad to get anybody to vent our ill-humour upon.

Cane seemed to feel rather ashamed of himself.

"Well, if you fellows will wait here, I'll just run on and see if there is a house anywhere near," he said, in a less confident tone than was his wont.

But at the first step he made, his foot failed him, and he tumbled headlong into a piece of boggy ground. He picked himself up, all wet and dirty, and, in spite of our dejection, we could not help laughing at the forlorn figure he cut.

"What are you laughing at?" he said, angrily.

"It's all very well for you to laugh, but I am wet through, I can tell you."

"So shall we all be, presently," said Beesley. "It is going to rain."

It was indeed. The drops were beginning to spatter down faster and faster, and the twilight was quite obscured by thick, heavy clouds that seemed to presage something more than a mere shower.

"Oh, this will never do!" cried Bryant, turning up the collar of his jacket. "We shall all catch our death of rheumatism, or scarlet fever, or something. I say, is that a tree there? I vote we make for it and take shelter."

No sooner said than done, and we found ourselves huddled round the trunk of a scrubby ash-tree, which from the first afforded us very little shelter, and soon began to drip upon us a great deal more water than it kept off, so that before long none of us had any reason to laugh at the soaked state of Tom Cane.

Misery upon misery! We stood silent and helpless. We were beyond quarrelling and reproaching now. The only one of us who seemed to keep up any spirit was Harry Bryant, who now came to the front as leader, *vice* Cane dismissed as incompetent.

"You know, you fellows, we are doing no good by

staying here," he said. "We can't be worse off than we are, and we may be better. I vote we go on and try to find some house."

This was sound advice, so we rose and dragged ourselves on. But it was now quite dark, and we could not discover the road by which we had reached the common. We did not know in which direction to turn. All we knew was, that at nine o'clock on a dark, wet night, we were knocking about Renchester Common, and tumbling at every step over rough stones, prickly bushes, and deep ruts or holes full of water. We had reached the height of misfortune. And I am prepared to make oath that Phillips was crying, though he afterwards denied the charge with the utmost indignation. I was too nearly overcome myself to make any doubt as to the state of his feelings.

For some time—it might have been a quarter of an hour, and it might have been two hours—we wandered on, not knowing whether we might not have to spend the night on the common, so tired that we could scarcely move a limb, and yet afraid to sit down in our wet clothes; for the wind that was now driving the drizzling rain into our faces was not one of those balmy zephyrs of spring which we read

so much about in the poets, but one of these bitter, sharp, cruel breezes that come from the east, to prevent us from thinking our English May too like the Garden of Eden, and are celebrated more in doctors' bills than in poets' verses. Wet, weary, chilled, famished, frightened; perhaps it was well for some of us, brought up hitherto in ease and comfort, to learn by experience what is the daily lot of so many of our less fortunate fellow-creatures.

At length—oh! how glad we were at the unexpected discovery!—at length we saw a light before us, and heard a dog bark. Columbus discovering America; the retreating Greeks catching sight of the sea; Robinson Crusoe finding the print of a human foot on the sand of his island;—these are historical incidents that will always fade in our minds into insignificance, as we remember with what emotions we again saw and heard signs of human habitation.

Now we allowed no obstacle to keep us back, but made straight for the light, floundering through bogs and bushes, over hedgerows and ditches, across ploughed fields and wet meadows, till we found ourselves in a little shrubbery surrounding a substantial farm-house, from the windows of which the ruddy

light shone *so* invitingly! At our approach more than one dog began to bark so loudly in the yard, that we stopped, fearing to alarm the inmates; and it was agreed that the rest of us should keep still where we were, while Harry Bryant went up to the house, and explained our plight to its owner.

Down we crouched, shivering beneath such protection as a belt of young larch trees could give against the heavy rain, and watched H. B. leap the fence and go up to the door. He knocked; we saw the door open and shut, and he did not come out again for a minute or two, which seemed to us an age.

"What a time he is!" grumbled Cane. "He needn't be telling them everything."

"Here he is!"

"Come in!" cried Harry, gleefully, running out and beckoning us forward. "It's all right. They are going to give us some grub and send us home. The farmer's a jolly fellow."

This was good news!

"What's his name?" asked Beesley, as he heaved his stiff limbs across the fence.

"His name? Oh! I don't know; but you'll see."

And in spite of our misfortunes, Harry was actually

laughing. We didn't know what could be the joke, and were too tired to ask.

Gladly we approached the open door of the hospitable mansion, and entered the passage, at the end of which we saw a clean warm spacious kitchen, with a roaring fire, and two women bustling about in what to our eyes was a strange garb, and coming out to welcome us the master of the house, who was no other than our fellow-traveller of the morning—old Ephraim!

At that sight we stopped, and Beesley, who had just crossed the threshold, made a step backwards, conscience-stricken!

“Come in, come in, friend,” said the old Quaker, kindly. “This is not a night to be out of doors, and I am glad that you have found your way to my house.”

He shut the door and ushered us into the kitchen, which seemed to be the family sitting-room. The women, his wife and daughter, hastened, with many exclamations of pity and sympathy, to set seats for us by the fire, and to make other preparations for our entertainment. Grateful, ashamed, and puzzled, we accepted these hospitable attentions, and felt the glow, not more of the blazing hearth, than of the



‘Come in, come in, friend,’ said the old Quaker kindly. ‘This is not a night to be out of doors.’—STORIES OF WHITMINSTER, p. 188.

“coals of fire” that “old Ephraim” was heaping upon us in return for the selfishness and rudeness with which we had treated him in the morning.

After what we had gone through, all this warmth and kindness had such a bewildering effect on me, that what happened next seemed like a dream. I have a sort of hazy remembrance of sitting in that comfortable kitchen, and feeling as if I never wished to leave it; of being unwilling to meet the grave loving faces, that never so much as alluded, by look or word, to the folly that had brought us into this predicament; of eating ham and toast, and brown bread and rich butter, and, oh! such good milk; of being well wrapped up in shawls, and laid on a sack in a large market cart; of jolting through the rain over rough country roads; of hearing a buzzing in my ears; of dreaming that Mr Vialls had caught me smoking, and that I had run away from school to escape being expelled; and, finally, of being shaken and awakened at the door of the schoolhouse, where the boys, in their nightshirts, were crowding to the windows to know what had happened to us. And this I recollect distinctly, that when we had taken leave of our friend the Quaker, mumbling out some hearty, but not very eloquent, expressions of gratitude, and

were disappearing into the house without further ceremony, he caught me by the arm, and detained me for a moment, to say, gravely and affectionately—

“Friend, if I were thee, I should not attempt to smoke tobacco the next time thou goest from home.”



CUPBOARD LOVE.



CUPBOARD LOVE.

WHEN we grow up, we don't have so many holidays as we had at school, and don't enjoy them half so well. Boys will not believe this, but it is true, as they will find out some day, perhaps. Still one does have a holiday sometimes, or life would be a bad business; and this summer the Fates, who are far stricter and more cruel than any schoolmaster, granted me a holiday of a week or two, which I went off to spend at the rapidly rising town of Easton-super-mud.

A day or two after my arrival, I was walking arm-in-arm with a friend of mine towards the Esplanade, when there passed us a neat brougham, drawn by a neat horse, driven by a neat coachman, and conveying a very neat gentleman, of whose profession there

could be no doubt, and whose face I somehow seemed to have seen before.

"Who is that?" repeated my friend, in answer to my inquiry. "Why, that is Dr Thomas Bredgman, one of the most rising medical men in this part of the world."

"Of course!" I exclaimed. "I was sure I remembered the face. I was at school with him. I am glad to see that he is getting on so well."

"Very well," said my friend, drily.

"We didn't use to have a very high opinion of Bredgman at Whitminster, but perhaps the good folks of Easton are better judges than we were, and think better of the Crocodile—that was his nickname."

"Some folks do."

"And some folks don't, eh?"

"Well, that's about it. You see, Dr Bredgman has what may be called a good practice, but it is nearly all of a certain kind. We have a great many old women, of both sexes, at Easton, and your friend has got a wonderful way of dealing with their particular ailments. It is grand to see the interest and sympathy which he shows when listening to the symptoms of an old lady who has eaten too much, and still better to hear the long and fine speeches in which he will de-

liver his opinion, when he has allowed the patient to relieve herself by talking for half an hour. Many old ladies feel almost well again when Bredgman has given his opinion on their case. Some malicious people say that his opinion, in plain language, generally comes to nothing more than this: 'That if the patient doesn't get better, she will get worse, and if she doesn't get worse, she will get better,' which is a very safe thing to say. Then he sends in a basketful of medicines, and if the old lady don't like them, he shows all his teeth and says, 'To the intelligent physician, the instinct of the patient is often the surest guide; we will change the draught, if you please.' After that, if the patient improves, he declares, 'I told you this treatment would have a wonderful effect;' and if she gets worse, he shakes his head in a solemn way, which gives her friends to understand that this is a very terrible disease, in which not even his talents can be of use. Oh, yes! Bredgman is getting on very well indeed. They say that he has got old Miss Stanton, who is so rich, to make her will in his favour."

"The boy is father to the man," I thought, as I listened to this account of my old schoolfellow's prosperity, and when it was finished, I began to laugh so

loudly as to shock the fashionable feelings of some of the Easton folks, who are very genteel.

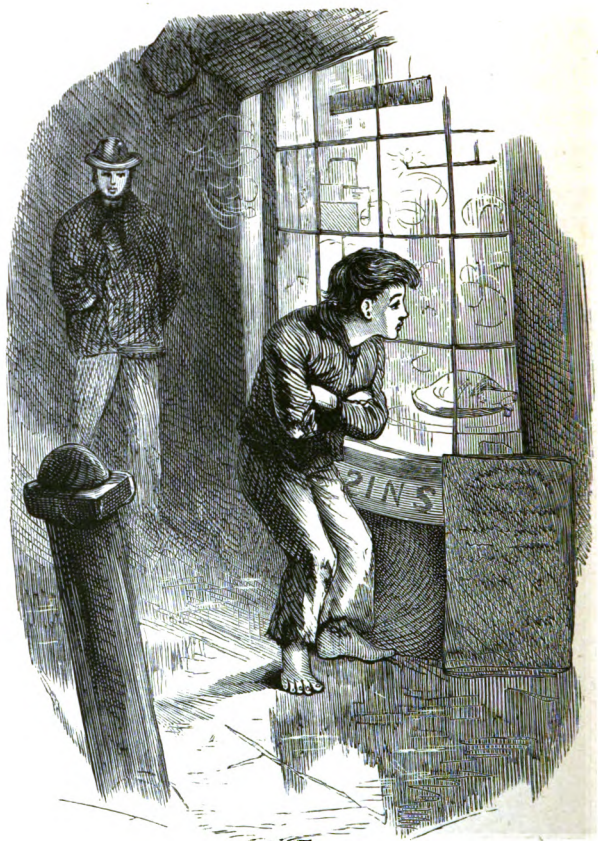
We walked on, and before we came back to dinner, I had told my friend what at the moment I could remember of Bredgman's school-life. If the reader will please to accompany us, in the spirit, as it were, he also shall hear something which may amuse and instruct him.

Bredgman, when he was at school, had little of that open-handedness and frank generosity which make a boy a favourite among his companions; but, on the other hand, he cultivated a pure platonic passion for the fair sex. Understand me, it was *old* ladies that Bredgman devoted himself to, and proved singularly successfully in winning the affections of a class of the community not generally very partial to schoolboys, unless they happen to be sons or grandsons. Bredgman's manner was so pleasant and polite, and his appearance so neat and gentlemanly, that the most orderly and particular maiden aunt could not fail to be favourably impressed by it; and he had only to brush his silky hair and put on a clean collar, to be irresistible in such quarters. He came, was seen, and conquered. So, early in life, the Crocodile began his career of drawing-room triumphs.

It has elsewhere been narrated how Master Bredgman enjoyed and forfeited the complete confidence of Mrs Pearson, our worthy dame. But when she sent for him to lecture him and point out the badness of his conduct, he looked so penitent and assured her so earnestly that "it would be a lesson to him for life," that Mrs Pearson's heart was softened, and he who came to be scolded, remained to tea ; nor was this the last time that he enjoyed her hospitality, for the good lady was very kind-hearted, and very easily taken in. It seemed to be a case of *vult decipi*, when some boys were in question. One night she caught Bredgman making an illegal incursion into that part of the school-house where the "cubs' dormitory" was, and when he seriously assured her that he was going to tell the little boys not to forget to say their prayers, I really think that she half believed him. She certainly believed him when, as he always did, if he got into a scrape and was scolded by her, he told her that she was the best friend he ever had, and that he would never forget her kindness all his life. Master B. knew how to put things.

The Crocodile never could do much with Mrs Bramble, our matron, which was a pity, seeing that she too had a cupboard, that, though not so well

furnished as Mrs Pearson's, was by no means to be despised. But in another quarter he secured a most valuable patroness—to wit, Mrs Matthews, the confectioner, who freely opened her heart and her bun-boxes to our schoolfellow. Malicious people, who are never wanting to sneer at pure and disinterested affection, have given out that this unwonted generosity was a stroke of policy on Mrs Matthews' part, inasmuch as she was at that time ambitious of having her establishment recognised as the tuck-shop in ordinary to our honourable body, and intended to use Bredgman as a decoy-duck to lead his companions into her sweet snares. Be that as it may, it seems that she, too, for a time fell under the fascinating power of the Crocodile, and treated him with great confidence and familiarity. The other small boys were astonished at the extent to which he seemed to make himself at home in the penetralia of that powerful shrine. At all hours of the day he might be seen sitting not only at the counter, but actually behind it, apparently on the most intimate terms with Mrs Matthews and her wares. It was certain that he helped her to add up her accounts; it was hinted that he also lent a hand at subtracting from her stock more than she was aware of. But she trusted him greatly, for, at that



When she first started in business at Whitminster, it was on a very small scale, and she was most anxious to secure a small portion of the patronage of the young gentlemen.—STORIES OF WHITMINSTER, p. 199.

time, being only in a small way of business and having no assistant, when she was obliged to go away from the shop for a little, she would leave Bredgman in charge, invested with full power over all the treasures that it contained. Under these circumstances it was not to be wondered at if he now and then ate a tart or two on the sly ; but surely he should have allowed no one else to rob his employer. For this again gave occasion for scandal, and it was said to have come to Mrs Matthews' ears that Bredgman had made a private arrangement with certain of his friends whereby they were enabled to buy sixpence worth of toffee for a penny. At all events, some cause of dissatisfaction must have arisen on Mrs Matthews' part, for—but we shall hear about it afterwards. I warn you that this is going to be a very rambling sort of story.

Here follows an episode, showing how Mrs Matthews attained the proud and profitable distinction which she coveted. She, or her successor, has a very fine shop now-a-days, and doesn't much care about having it crowded with impudent schoolboys ; but when she first started in business at Whitminster, it was on a very small scale, and she was most anxious to secure a small portion of the patronage of the young gentlemen. She had been cook to Major Hawley, who,

soon after she set up her shop, stood as the Buff candidate for Whitminster. Willing to get a little popularity for himself, at the same time that he did a good turn to his old servant, this gallant and truly liberal officer caused it to be proclaimed that every boy in the school might, during the election, present himself daily at Mrs Matthews, and, with empty pockets, eat a tart or bun at his expense.

Mr Baynes, of the High Street, had hitherto enjoyed the favour of receiving our pocket-money, and when this novel electioneering manœuvre came to his ears, he pronounced it be "a low dodge," gave out that the Buff party was ruining the country, and at once reduced the price of his strawberry puffs from three halfpence to a penny. But his fears were ungrounded; we were not to be bribed to act contrary to our convictions. We were all Blue, to a boy. First, we supported the Blue candidate, Lord Renchester, because he was a lord, and because he drove four-in-hand, which we rightly considered to be a most valuable accomplishment in a legislator. Secondly, we hated the Buff cause, because the editor of the Buff paper, when Mayor of Whitminster, had not done his duty in the way of asking for holidays for us, but, on the contrary, had forbidden a bonfire with

which we meant to have celebrated the Fifth of November. Thirdly, we had an idea that to be Blue was, on the whole, more genteel. Then Mr Vialls, our most unpopular master, was known to be on the Buff side, and that was enough to settle our opinions. So, though most of us went regularly to Mrs Matthews' and ate the tarts put at our disposal, we declared that there was not enough juice in them, and stuck to our principles and to Baynes, the Blue house, as a place to spend our own money at. And when the day of the poll came, we turned out in blue ribbons, the boys in Mr Vialls' form providing themselves with a double quantity. Mr Vialls exercised an unconstitutional power over such of the boys as were boarders in the schoolhouse, by confining them to gates after school hours, but the rest were able to take part in the proceedings of the day, and did so with great effect, pushing and howling about everywhere, and occasionally being led by some malicious wag to raise a cheer for "Manhood suffrage and our old institutions," or "No Popery, and three cheers for the ballot." Thus early and earnestly did the youth of Whitminster prepare themselves to take a part in public affairs. Indeed, one boy, by name Sargent, enjoyed the honour and glory of having his head broken by a

drunken Irishman ; and two more seriously informed their less fortunate companions, next day, that they had been chased by a Buff mob, who wished to tear them in pieces.

Major Hawley was so displeased by our political opinions, that he never treated us again at Matthews', and most of us ceased to frequent her establishment, though at this time her intimacy with Bredgman began. But Time, which is more powerful than Majors, brought about a transference of our allegiance from our old shop. Mr Baynes, thinking our custom too secure, and troubled by conscientious or financial scruples, in an evil hour advised himself to give out that in future our transactions must be entirely conducted on the ready-money principle. This gave dire umbrage to some of the most important members of our body, and the luckless tradesman offended others by refusing to sell cigars to boys under fifteen. Strikes were not so common then as they unhappily are in these days, when the very beggars seem inclined to strike for a higher rate of alms ; but we resolved to strike, and formed a sort of trades' union against Baynes, which was supported by "rattening," "picketing," and all the most objectionable features of such unions. Certain of the big fellows announced

that any member of the community seen going into Baynes' shop would "catch it;" and this threat was carried out upon the person of unlucky Dick de Wilton, even when his aunt had taken him there to treat him. Then boys remembered the once-despised sweets of Matthews, and began to rally round her standard. Mrs Matthews, cunningly advised thereto by Bredgman, was able to rise to the emergency. She took a new shop, conveniently near our cricket-field and not out of bounds. From that day she prospered.

But we must now return from public to private affairs, and tell of our hero's next conquest among the fair sex. Bredgman had a schoolfellow called Abbing, and Abbing had an aunt in the town called Miss Simmons. She was a somewhat formal and fidgety old maid, who lived in a very prim and proper house in the suburbs, Laurel Villa by name, and there spent her life in a constant agony of suspicions, that the mark of the housemaid's thumb was on the butter, that the stairs creaked, that there was a man in the house, that the man-servant had been drinking, that the cook had been to a dissenting chapel, that the country was going to ruin, that her money was not safe in the Funds, that she was sitting in a draught,

and so forth. It may be imagined that she had a certain horror of Master Abbing, who was as noisy, restless, and mischievous a nephew as any boy in three kingdoms ; but Miss Simmons was a conscientious old lady, and strove to do her duty to the boy by occasionally asking him to spend a half holiday at her house. Once she gave him permission to bring a friend with him, "a nice, genteel boy, remember, and don't forget to tell him to bring his house-shoes." Bredgman answered to this description more than most fellows ; besides, at that time Abbing owed him three-pence and could not pay, so these two came to an arrangement, and the Crocodile obtained a footing in Miss Simmons' hospitable mansion.

At first the old lady regarded her new guest through her gold-rimmed spectacles with customary distrust ; but before long she was favourably impressed by his prepossessing appearance and polite way of speaking. She could not help thinking that he was a much nicer boy than her nephew, and soon found herself conversing with him with considerable ease, and asking him questions about himself in the most friendly way, which questions Bredgman answered very readily and satisfactorily, while Abbing sat opposite and applied himself to the muffins, as knowing that the opportunity

was short and seldom, and silently kicked the legs of the table, and admired the conversational talents of his friend. When his aunt had fully satisfied herself that Bredgman's father was engaged in a most genteel occupation, and that his mother was connected with that excessively respectable family the Thomases of Llanhcrmmyrwd in Radnorshire, her heart warmed still more towards him, and she ordered Sarah to bring forth the rich, the precious, the luscious guava jelly, which Abbing had not seen for many a day. Then she took to putting questions to Bredgman about himself, and among others, asked him how he came by a suspicious-looking mark on his hand.

"That!" said Bredgman, concealing the wounded member under the table, and pausing a little to reflect; "Oh! I hit it against a piece of wood, yesterday."

The reader may guess for himself what had happened to Bredgman's hand. Abbing had reason to know very well, and he was so tickled by something in this answer that he couldn't help laughing. I have recorded a good deal against Abbing's character; but he had this one good point in him, that he could laugh and no mistake. Count no boy utterly bad who can give a hearty, honest guffaw, as Abbing now did. Perhaps a certain accomplishment of his friend

had something to do with it. Bredgman was said to be able to wink with one side of his face and to look singularly serious with the other.

"Dear me! I am afraid you schoolboys are very careless," said Miss Simmons, casting a glance of reproof towards her nephew, who was struggling with his risible feelings.

"Yes, ma'am, I'm afraid we are," rejoined Bredgman, very meekly, and Abbing went off again. "But accidents will always happen, Miss Simmons."

"You are right, my dear. All we can do is to take the greatest possible care. But remember this, that though we may be unfortunate in spite of our best efforts, it always depends on ourselves whether we are naughty or well-behaved. I hope, at all events, that you are always a *good* boy."

"I try my best, ma'am," said Bredgman, casting down his eyes demurely; and at this point, Abbing's sense of the ludicrous again overcame him, and the laughing fit which he had been trying to smother burst out again with a great explosion.

"Henry," said the old lady, looking severely at him through her spectacles, "what is the matter with you?"

"Something I was thinking about—I can't help

it—it wasn't anything particular—Ugh! ugh!" coughed out Abbing, in great distress, for he had swallowed a bit of cake the wrong way.

His aunt continued to frown, and Bredgman cast a look of gentle and friendly reproach upon his unfortunate companion; so, when Abbing had got the cake safely disposed of, he was sobered for the moment. But all the evening he kept breaking out again at intervals of five minutes or so, and his aunt, instead of being pleased to see that he could be so easily amused, grew very much offended, and shook hands with him at length in a stiff way that was intended to intimate it would be a long time before he was asked there again.

But not such were her feelings towards Bredgman, whom she took leave of with considerable cordiality, and pressed him to come and see her soon. And in fact, before many days, the Crocodile performed a morning call in due form, rubbing his boots on the door-mat very industriously, and sitting down in the drawing-room very proper, with his hat on his knee. After the usual remarks about the weather, and telling her what a pleasant evening he had had at her house, he touched upon politics, and inquired very gravely—

"Have you heard whether Lord Palmerston is likely to have a majority, Miss Simmons?"

"No ; I haven't seen the papers to-day. How do you come to know about these things?"

"Oh! I take a great interest in politics. Don't you think boys ought to study the newspapers, and see what is going on?" said Bredgman, but found he had made a mistake, for the old lady replied, warmly—

"Indeed I don't. I am afraid young people get a great deal of harm out of the newspapers, now-a-days."

"I am afraid they do," said Bredgman, looking serious. "Of course, I don't mean that young people ought to read the newspapers as much as they like, but only extracts selected by their parents and friends, who know what would be good for them."

"I agree with you there. Really there is so much mischievous trash published at the present day! And I am glad to hear what you say about parents and guardians. At the present day, the tendency is for people to think themselves wiser than their parents"

"Ah, yes!" sighed Bredgman.

"It was not so when I was a girl," said Miss Simmons.

"No, indeed," said Bredgman. "I wish I lived in the good old times. There is a great deal of evil at the present day."

"Indeed there is! You must let me give you a glass of wine and a biscuit. I know schoolboys are always ready to eat."

"Oh! thank you, ma'am. I don't much care about eating, but I am afraid that some of the boys of the present day are very greedy."

And, in short, before the visit had ended, these two found themselves agreed that things in general were in a bad way, and that "the present day" was all that it ought not to be. Bredgman had two glasses of wine and five biscuits, besides a small parcel of them which was given him to put in his pocket. Miss Simmons thought him the most gentlemanly, affectionate, and sensible boy she had ever seen, and pressed him to come and see her often, which Bredgman assured her he would do when he could spare time from his lessons.

And, before long, he had become a very constant and welcome visitor to Laurel Villa, whereas poor Abbing was almost banished from his aunt's presence as a coarse lubberly creature, who couldn't sit still, nor open his mouth, except to put something into it

or to say something silly and vulgar. Bredgman's manners and conversation, on the other hand, were most satisfactory, and his opinions, for a boy of his age, were found to be wonderfully sound and sensible, seeing that they always agreed with the good lady's own. Bredgman was not long of finding out that his new patroness had other aversions besides "the present day." For one, she did not like Mrs Pearson. People said that once on a time the then youthful Miss Simmons had not been indisposed to become Dr Pearson's wife herself; but now she professed to hold all schoolmasters in contempt and suspicion, either because they were too useful members of society to be sufficiently genteel, or because they had too much to do with the heresies of "the present day." So Miss Simmons was not at all well pleased to see Mrs Pearson, on the rare occasions when they met, taken out of a room before her as a doctor of divinity's wife, and openly professed to look down upon her and her establishment. It was grand to see her bowing to the other lady from her one-horse brougham; and her remarks when the Pearsons set up a pony-carriage were very withering.

"They live in no style, after all," she said. "They have only one vegetable at dinner, I am told."

Bredgman was not long of finding out this antipathy, and his friend Mrs Pearson would have been very much shocked and astonished if she could have heard the way he used to make fun of her little weaknesses in Miss Simmons' drawing-room. The latter lady always warned him to be careful not to cultivate a habit of speaking satirically, but she listened with great interest, and was full of sympathy. when Bredgman told her how stingy Mrs Pearson was and how badly the boys were fed. This was not fair of the Crocodile, for more than one reason. First, we were fed very decently, as schools go; and Mrs Pearson and the matron took a great deal of trouble about this department. Second, Bredgman's family were not very well off, and the Pearsons kept him for almost nothing, out of pure kindness. Third, he was singularly successful in taking care that he should have as good a share as anybody else of what might be going. But Miss Simmons believed that the boy was half starved, and never allowed him to pay her a visit without opening her cupboard—a kind of practical pity which met the Crocodile's views exactly.

He soon found out that Miss Simmons had another object of dislike in the world besides Mrs Pearson—

to wit, the Pope. She was always railing against that "proud pagan," and warning every one with whom she came in contact against his machinations; so Bredgman read up on the subject, and took care to come to his patroness with sad tales about dreadful doings at Rome, and secret plots of the Jesuits, who, they agreed, were likely in "the present day" to bring the country to ruin. These sound Protestant sentiments were well rewarded; and, if the Pope never bestowed another blessing of any value, he was to Bredgman the unconscious cause of much benefit in the way of apples, nuts, and ginger-wine. And Miss Simmons one day presented him with half-a-crown for saying that he never passed the new ritualistic church without feeling inclined to throw a stone at it, which, however, she strongly advised him not to do, for fear of coming in contact with the police.

But another and wiser horror which Miss Simmons tried to impress upon her young friend was of debt. Many a shilling and sixpence did she give him to promise that he would never buy anything on credit. She was always telling him, and, indeed, other people besides him, how her father was a county magistrate, and might have been a member of parliament, if he had not got into debt and lost a great part of his

property ; otherwise, she gave it to be understood, she would be enjoying the pleasures of the highest society, and not wasting her sweetness on the desert air of Whitminster, and living in a wretched little house like Laurel Villa, with three public rooms, five bedrooms, coachhouse, conservatory, etc., all to herself.

"Now tell me, you are sure you don't owe anything?" she said for the twentieth time, on the occasion of bestowing one of the above-mentioned benefactions.

"Oh! no, Miss Simmons," said Bredgman, looking quite shocked at the very idea. "Have you heard that the Pope is going to make seven new cardinals?"

"No. How very dreadful!"

The Crocodile had good reason for turning the conversation in this way. The fact was, that he *was* in debt just then, and was puzzling himself considerably how to get out of it. The old affection between him and Mrs Matthews had cooled, and as she found herself in difficulties with her landlord, she was pressing for the payment of certain little accounts, and among others, one of about ten shillings that our friend owed her.

"Why, I never thought you meant to ask me for it," said Bredgman, in an injured tone.

"Poor people must live, Master Thomas. I must have my money, or I must speak to Mr Vialls. If you didn't mean to pay for the things, you shouldn't have eaten 'em ; that's what I call common sense."

"Oh! don't do that," cried Bredgman, in alarm. "I'll give you a shilling now, and I'll pay all the rest soon. Old Miss Simmons will give me the money. She's as soft as anything, and gives me whatever I ask for. You have seen me driving about with her in her carriage, and you know she is as rich as an old Jew. I promise to pay you soon. I really will, Mrs Matthews; but don't tell Vialls. You know, you had better not, for if he hears you have been letting the fellows go on tick, he will put your shop out of bounds."

There was something in this argument, and Mrs Matthews promised not to tell Mr Vialls. Indeed, she probably never meant to do so, for she was a good-natured soul, and, like other people in the town who had to do with the boys, she looked upon Mr Vialls as a fierce and barbarous monster, to whose tender mercies she would be loath to deliver any one.

But Mrs Matthews began to get angry and to repent of her promise, when she found that Master

Bredgman, instead of paying her as he had promised, was trying to settle the matter by staying away from her shop altogether. It was not so much his dishonesty she was vexed at, as his ingratitude, for she had always kept a soft heart and an open hand for him, and though he now seemed faithless, she loved him still, and all the more because he slighted her love. The heart of woman is a thing strange and hard to understand, as many poets and moralists have frequently remarked. At all events, she bore with our hero's desertion of her for some weeks, till he began to hope that Ariadne had forgotten him, and then was aroused from his dream of security by a message, per another small boy, to the effect that if he didn't pay what he owed her, Mrs Matthews would speak to one of the prefects or somebody.

Bredgman received this notice when he returned to the schoolhouse after the conversation lately mentioned with Miss Simmons, and much did he regret that he had already spent the greater part of that good lady's shilling on tarts and ginger-beer at another shop. Mrs Matthews was reported to have spoken as if she was in earnest, and it was clear to him that something ought to be done in the matter without delay. So, after thinking it over in after-

noon school, he sat down and wrote the following letter in his best hand—and he always wrote a good hand:—

“MY DEAR PAPA,—I hope you and mamma are very well. I am very well, but I have had a great many headaches lately. I don’t think getting up so early in the morning agrees with me, and I always feel unwell after being long at my lessons. You will be glad to hear that I have been getting on much better lately, and I hope to have a good report at the end of this half; but it is very hard work to keep up in the form, and Mr Vialls is a terribly strict master, but I like him all the better for it, for I know it is good for me. I have taken great care of the money you gave me when I came to school, but I lost five shillings one day, and I have none left, and I want so much to buy some books and things, and the boys are bothering me to pay my subscription to the cricket-club. I don’t see the good of it myself, but I must pay or they will all set on me. So, my-dear papa, I should be very much obliged if you would send me ten shillings, and I will take great care of it, as I wish, above all things, not to get into debt. Please send the money by a post-office order *soon*. I

think I am going to get a prize.—I am, your most affectionate son,
THOMAS BREDGMAN.

“*P.S.*—Give my love to mamma. I have not had a hamper for ever so long.”

Bredgman read this letter carefully over, sealed it, and was about to take it out to the post, when a summons came to him from one of the prefects.

“Bredgman! Bredgman!” Abbing was howling out all over the house. “Blackburn wants to speak to you in his study.”

“Bother! Tell him I have gone out.”

“Tell him yourself. If he finds out, you will catch it, and so will I. Better go.”

“Well, would you mind taking this letter to the post for me, Abbing?”

“All right! I’m going out, anyhow,” said Abbing, shoving the letter into his jacket-pocket, and strolling off with his cap on the back of his head, while Bredgman betook himself to Blackburn’s study, his serene and placid mind in a state of unwonted disquietude.

Now Blackburn was the most formidable, and what bad little boys called the most “meddlesome” of the prefects.

"Shut the door," he said, sharply. "Bredgman, do you owe Mrs Matthews any money?"

"Mrs Matthews!" said Bredgman, looking as if he was trying to recollect.

"Yes; Mrs Matthews. None of your humbug now, Bredgman; it's no use with me. She tells me you owe her some money."

"I believe I do—about two or three shillings."

"She says ten. Don't you tell any lies, Crocodile, or—— Isn't it ten shillings?"

"Perhaps it is," was wrung out of Bredgman.

"Well, why haven't you paid her?"

"I—I forgot. But I will pay her."

"I know you will. I have promised to see about that. Look here, Bredgman. You don't go into the town, or stir out of this house except to go to school, till you have paid every penny of this money. Do you understand me?"

"Yes," said Bredgman, very humbly.

"Now, sit down here, take this sheet of paper, and write what I tell you. *My dear father*, or whatever you call him."

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Bredgman, laying down the pen. "I don't want to write to my father. I am very sorry. I really am, Blackburn."

"Go on!" cried Blackburn, and seeing that he was not obeyed, he began to rummage in the corner of his study, where was a goodly collection of cricket-stumps, singlesticks, and other instruments capable of being used for persuasive purposes.

"I will write, Blackburn," whimpered Bredgman. "But let me write to my mother. I always write to her."

"Not a bit of it. I have heard that you come over her in a fine style, but you needn't try it on with me. Write what I tell you at once;" and thereupon he armed himself with a singlestick and stood over the unwilling correspondent.

Bredgman, seeing there was no help for it, dried something like a tear which he had been trying to produce, and wrote as he was ordered:—

"MY DEAR FATHER,—I am desired to tell you that I owe ten shillings to Mrs Matthews, the confectioner, and that I have been keeping away from her shop to get off paying it."

"I didn't intend to do that," muttered Bredgman.

"Go on!" was all Blackburn said. "Put whatever you like at the end, if you have anything to say to excuse yourself. Put your name, then. Now,

this envelope. Address it. That will do. You will put this in the post, and let your father know the way you bring disgrace on the school by your mean tricks."

"I haven't a stamp."

"Oh! that won't hinder. I'll give you one. Here! Stick it on."

A gleam of hope came into Bredgman's mind, and he began to look edifying, as he knew how to do.

"Well, Blackburn," he said, "I'm very sorry. I know I oughtn't to have done it; but I am much obliged to you for preventing me from getting into a worse scrape. I'll go and post the letter now, and I won't go out again till I get the money and pay Mrs Matthews."

"You had better not," said Blackburn. "Now get off, and put that letter in the post at once. Stop! You had better give it me. I'll post it myself."

A little plan of Mr Bredgman's was thus spoiled, and with rage in his tender heart, and tears in his gentle eyes, he left the room and went away to meditate on the terrible scrape he seemed to have got into.

Pity the poor Crocodile thus neatly caught in a trap, and looking forward with painful anxiety to what would come of it! He had not even the com-

fort of eating anything, for Blackburn informed him that he should take charge of his pocket-money on Mrs Matthews' account, and he could not seek consolation in Miss Simmons' cupboard. If it had been only a master who had forbidden him to go into the town, he might have managed it ; but Blackburn was more formidable than most of the masters. In this miserable predicament he awaited from day to day the answer to the two letters which had been sent to his father by the same post ; and, alas ! he knew what his father would think of the matter. That was why he had wished to write to his mother, who had always spoiled and indulged him, and took the most favourable view of his little infirmities.

When two or three days had passed, Bredgman thought he might as well write to his mother, and make out as good a story for himself as possible. So he indited a long letter, piteously telling her how he had been led astray by some bad companions, and how he had run into debt, and how he was very sorry, and how he would never do it again, and how he hoped his father wouldn't be very angry with him, and so forth. This letter he had posted on Thursday, and on Saturday morning, to his great relief and satisfaction, received the following reply :—

"MY DEAR TOMIKINS,—I am *so* sorry to hear what you tell me in your letter. *Luckily* your papa has been from home for a week, and I found your letter, to him *unopened*, (I never noticed it before), and took it away, and we will keep the secret between us, for he will be *dreadfully* angry if he comes to know. I send you a post-office order for ten shillings as a *present* from your *loving* mamma; but now, my dear child, you must promise me *never, never* to get in debt again, for I can't tell you how *dangerous* it is, and your papa *highly* disapproves of it. I know that my darling has good *principles*, and that he *tries* to do *right*; but, my dear Tommy, you must not allow *yourself* to be corrupted by the bad companions you meet at school. Most schoolboys are very coarse and dishonest, and I don't like *you* to mix with them. I am trying hard to get your papa to take you away from school and have you *at home* with me; but in the meanwhile you must keep away from all companions, and so you will not be tempted to do wrong *again*. Write *at once*, and say that you have got the money and *paid* your debt, and believe me, my darling Tommy, ever your affectionate

"MAMMY."

"P.S.—I have sent you a little *hamper* by goods train. It ought to arrive about Monday.

"P.P.S.—Be sure *never* to do it again, or I shall be *very* angry."

When Bredgman found himself so unexpectedly delivered from his difficulties, his delight was naturally very great, and in the fulness of his heart he was minded to celebrate the event by a festive meeting at Miss Simmons'. Accordingly, he held a confabulation with Abbing, taking him partly into his confidence with regard to his debt, and proposing to him a plan for passing the afternoon in amusement and eating, into which plan Abbing entered *con amore*.

"Well," said Bredgman, "just wait a minute while I write the letters you are to take to your aunt and Mrs Matthews. Be sure you get money for the order before you go to her shop, and make her give you a receipt for it, or that fool Blackburn won't let me out."

Here is the copy of the letters Bredgman now wrote, first addressing an envelope for each of them : —

"MY DEAR MISS SIMMONS,—I am afraid you will think me very rude for not coming to see you this long time. The fact is, I have been rather busier than

usual with my work ; and, to tell the truth, Mrs Pearson doesn't much approve of my going to see you, and won't let me come so often. Isn't it ill-natured of her ? But I am not going to be kept away always from such a kind friend, and Abbing and I are going to try to get leave to come and spend the afternoon with you, if you will send us a note of invitation to show to Mr Vialls. Please send it before dinner. I hope we shall find you in, and I am, yours most sincerely,

T. BREDGMAN."

"DEAR MOTHER MATTHEWS,—It was very shabby of you to tell Blackburn about that money. I wish you knew what an awful licking I have had about it. I always told you I would pay you, only that stupid old donkey Miss Simmons has not forked out so much as usual lately, like a stingy old cat that she is. But she has just given me a sovereign, and Abbing is going to pay the ten shillings I owe you. I won't have another tick with you, and none of the fellows will, if you go *telling*.—Yours truly,

"T. BREDGMAN."

"P.S.—Will you send me three sticks of chocolate, for discount for ready money ?"

"Now, haven't you finished these blessed scrawls of yours?" said Abbing, looking round from the window, where he had been amusing himself by killing flies. "If you don't look sharp, I shan't have time to do it all before dinner."

"Yes, here they are," said Bredgman, hastily sealing up the above epistles.

Abbing carelessly shoved them into his jacket-pocket, and, as he did so, fished up another letter, which seemed to have been lying there in very dirty company for several days.

"I say!" he involuntarily exclaimed.

"What's the row?"

"I declare this is your letter—the one you gave me to post last week. I forgot all about it. I'm awfully sorry, old fellow," pleaded Abbing, who expected to see his friend get terribly angry about it.

But Bredgman was in high good-humour. He was quite pleased that his letter had not gone, for the one thing that had still been giving him uneasiness was the suspicion that somehow or other it might fall into his father's hands and lead to further inquiries. So he tore it in pieces, and graciously assured Abbing of his forgiveness.

"Only don't you forget these two letters, nor the money order."

"All serene!" said Abbing, and went off on his mission.

Now if any honest-hearted readers are indignant that Bredgman should have wriggled out of the punishment he so justly deserved, and that he is now seen to triumph in his deceit, I will let them into a secret. These sly fellows are often very successful in dodging Nemesis, but somewhere or other they are sure to be caught somehow, and, as likely as not, in their own snares. When Bredgman folded up these notes we have just read, he put them in *the wrong envelopes*. Now read them again, and chuckle at the pit our tricky friend has dug for himself.

Knowing what we do, and what Bredgman didn't, we shall not be so astonished as he was that the expected invitation did not arrive before dinner. No, nor after dinner; and when the hour for call-over began to approach, and our friends feared they would be pressed into the service of fielding in the cricket-field, they grew desperate, and Bredgman made a bold proposal to Abbing, which the latter was rather startled by.

"It will be all right," said Bredgman. "I have

done it before, and he never suspected. Depend on it, your aunt has gone out. I think she told me she was going to the flower-show at Holmby to-day ; that will be jolly. We'll have tea by ourselves, and have a go at the gooseberries."

"Well, you must write it," said Abbing, wavering at this prospect.

"Of course I will ;" and in high spirits Bredgman once more addressed himself to the task of letter-writing, this time imitating a lady's hand, as he could do very well. In a few minutes he had produced the following note, which he enclosed in a suitable envelope, and took to Mr Vialls' room :—

"Miss Simmons presents her compliments, and would be very much obliged if Mr Vialls would allow Mr Bredgman and her nephew, Henry Abbing, to spend the evening with her, returning at nine o'clock. Miss Simmons will take care that they prepare their lessons for Monday.

"LAUREL VILLA, *Saturday Morning.*"

Mr Vialls was not in, so Bredgman took the note to Mrs Pearson to ask her leave to go out.

"Dear me, Thomas, I am sorry for this," she said. "I intended to have had you to tea to-night myself."

"I am very sorry too, ma'am," said Bredgman, in his most taking manner. "I would far rather come to you. I don't like going to Miss Simmons', but as she is so kind as to ask me, I suppose I must."

"You are quite right, my dear. Go by all means, and you shall come to tea with me to-morrow."

"Oh, thank you, ma'am! You are always so kind to me, Mrs Pearson."

Off Bredgman went in high glee to tell Abbing the successful result of his device; and as they were both already dressed in their best clothes, they did not delay a moment, but set off at once for Laurel Villa, where they intended to spend the rest of the day very agreeably.

They rang the bell, and the door was duly opened by Miss Simmons' maid, Eliza, who informed them that her mistress had gone out in the carriage.

"I suppose she has," said Bredgman, coolly walking in and leading the way to the dining-room, whispering to Abbing, "I told you she would be going to the flower-show."

While the dining-room is shut, we will stop in the passage, and I will whisper something to you. Miss Simmons had passed the afternoon in a state of mingled grief, anger, and bewilderment over Bredg-

man's letter to Mrs Matthews, which, as you will remember, had been sent to herself by mistake. Five minutes before, she had gone to Mrs Matthews to seek an explanation, and when she read the note addressed to herself, her astonishment and indignation were doubled. After comparing notes, Bredgman's two sweethearts proceeded together to Mrs Pearson's to clear up the matter. So we can see the sword of Damocles, which, invisible to Bredgman and Abbing, was hanging over their festivity.

Eliza was a little struck by the young gentlemen making themselves so much at home, but she supposed that her mistress must have expected them, and went about her work with a quiet mind. Presently the dining-room bell rang, and she answered it, as in duty bound.

"Eliza," said, very softly, Mr Bredgman, who was standing before the fire with his hands in his pockets, quite *à la paterfamilias*, "we are going to spend the evening here, and Miss Simmons won't be in just yet, so we shall want tea directly."

"Very well, sir."

"You will see we have everything nice, Eliza. Miss Simmons would be vexed if she knew we were not attended to."

Eliza thought this rather an extraordinary proceeding in such a punctual and well-regulated household, but she still supposed it was all right, and went to get tea. Then the uninvited guests, after filling their pockets from a biscuit-box on the sideboard, strolled out to see if the gooseberries and currants were ripe in the garden.

But Miss Simmons' careful servant, who united the functions of gardener and coachman, had locked the door and taken the key in his pocket. Moreover, the wall was high, and after Abbing had torn his Sunday trousers in attempting to climb it, they found it necessary to give up that part of the programme, and content themselves with tormenting Miss Simmons' cat, against which Bredgman had a grudge as a rival in its mistress's affections. After thus spending some time in the pleasures of the chase, they returned to the dining-room, and found tea neatly laid out for them, with muffins, toast, cake, and jam. But Bredgman was not satisfied.

"Eliza," he said, when the bell was again answered, "have you not any meat? We are rather hungry, and I think Miss Simmons would like us to have something better than this."

"There's a cold pie, I think," said Eliza, somewhat

doubtfully, for she was wondering what cook would say.

"Well, that will do, if there is nothing else. Bring some pickles with it."

"Yes, sir; I will see if I can get any."

"And look here, Eliza, I don't much care for strawberry jam; can't you give us any other?"

"There's marmalade in the cupboard, sir."

"That's right. Now look sharp with the pie and the pickles; there's a good girl," said Bredgman, patronisingly, while Abbing sat silently wondering at his friend's audacity, and, in case of mistakes, began at once to make play with the muffins.

"I say, what will she say?" he remarked, at length, with his mouth full.

"Oh! it's all right. Leave that to me. I know how to manage your aunt by this time."

The pie, pickles, and so forth, were duly produced, and the two friends proceeded to fall to, pressing each other to eat, and taking tremendous helpings of everything. First a great hole was made in the pie; then the toast and muffins went, helped down by little heaps of jam, marmalade, and butter. The bread they scorned as unworthy of the occasion, but the cake was found not to be beneath their attention.

When they seemed no longer able to eat any more, they returned to the pickles, which they thought would aid digestion or promote appetite ; and indeed under this stimulant they were able to manage another slice of cake apiece. All up to this point has gone off capitally ; but now I am going to tell a story which has been told before :—

“ Le couvert se trouva mis.
Je laisse à penser la vie
Que firent les deux amis.

Le régal fut fort honnête ;
Rien ne manquait au festin ;
Mais quelqu'un troubla la fête,
Pendant qu'ils étaient en train.”

Bredgman was just mixing up the rest of the contents of the cream-jug with a little marmalade as a final *bonne bouche*, when he heard the sound of carriage wheels, looked out of the window, and the spoon fell from his hands.

There were Mrs Pearson and Miss Simmons in the latter's carriage, and Mrs Matthews sitting up on the box, as befitted her inferior station. Bredgman would rather have seen the three Furies.

“ Oh, be quick ! ” he cried, jumping up in such a hurry as to upset and smash two or three tea-cups, and dragging Abbing out of the room.

"Where are you going?" remonstrated Abbing. "They are sure to know that we have been here, anyhow."

"We must hide! Where shall we hide!" exclaimed Bredgman, eagerly; his wonted coolness had quite deserted him at this dangerous juncture.

There was a vigorous pull at the bell, and Eliza's steps could already be heard coming up the kitchen stairs. Not a moment was to be lost. The boys made for the staircase, but, seeing a large cupboard open beside them, Bredgman bolted into it, Abbing followed him, and they pulled the door to, just as Eliza appeared in the passage, smoothing out her apron and setting her cap straight for the reception of her mistress.

The boys now heard three voices, all familiar to them, but could not make out what they were saying. The whole party seemed to proceed into the dining-room, and then the voices were raised louder in indignation and wonder.

"Oh! Bredgman, there are rats in this cupboard," said Abbing, in a tone of horror. "I hear them all about. I can't bear them; you can't think how I hate them. Oh, I can't stay here!"

"Be quiet, you fool," whispered Bredgman, holding

him back. "We *must* stay here for a little, I tell you ; and as soon as they are out of the way, we can bolt off, and make some excuse. I will think of one if I can only get time. Hush ! here they are !"

"What can have become of them ?" Miss Simmons was saying, as she led the way out of the room.

"They were here a minute ago, ma'am," said Eliza. "I think they must have gone to the drawing-room when they had finished their tea."

"And my furniture ! wretched boys !" exclaimed the lady of the house.

"They are a pretty pair !" came from Mrs Pearson. "I believe they are the worst boys in the school, especially Bredgman, though he has taken me in many a time ; indeed he would have been expelled long ago if I hadn't stood up for him. But he doesn't catch me making friends with him again, nor you either, Miss Simmons, I should think."

"Oh, certainly not ! I didn't think there was such a bad boy in the world, though I never thought much of boys at any time. I assure you, Mrs Pearson, I never wrote a line of that note ; it must be an impudent forgery. But let us go upstairs, and ask them what it all means."

Bredgman nudged his companion, as if to say that this was all right, and that now they would be able to make off. They heard the ladies' dresses rustling by; but before Miss Simmons went upstairs, her keen eye detected a breach of her domestic arrangements, and she halted right in front of our friends' hiding-place.

"Eliza, this cupboard does not seem to be locked, and the key is in the door. How often have I desired you not to leave it open?"

"I think it must have been cook, ma'am," said Eliza, stepping forward, shutting the door tight and turning the key, to the horror and disgust of the two boys inside.

Just then Abbing felt, or thought he felt, a rat rubbing against his leg, and could not restrain a faint scream, which was re-echoed in louder tones from the outside.

"Oh, dear!" cried Miss Simmons, in terror, "there's a man in the cupboard! Eliza, Eliza, how often have I warned you about this? What shall we do? Where's John?"

"Fetch a policeman," suggested Mrs Matthews, in an excited voice.

"Stop! give me the key," said Mrs Pearson, who

was less flurried than the rest, and knew better what she was about.

She laid down her umbrella, and advanced boldly to the cupboard. Inside, the knees of Abbing and Bredgman shook, and their faces turned pale in the darkness. The key turned in the lock, the door opened, and——

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Soon afterwards Bredgman left Whitminster.



LITTLE MONKEYS.



LITTLE MONKEYS.

DICK de Wilton was always in trouble at school. Perhaps he deserved all he got, but I don't know that he was so much worse than other people, though he certainly was not better; but then he seemed to be singularly unlucky in the way of not escaping the consequences of whatever he might do. If he cut his finger, it always festered. As surely as he saw a cat, his hand went mechanically towards a stone, and then no less surely a window would come in the way. When he went up to say his repetition, he was generally put on at the hardest part, and he could never find eloquence to convince the master that he "knew all the rest." It was difficult even to do him a favour without getting him into mischief. When he had a tool-box given him as a

birthday present, he bruised his thumb with the hammer so badly that he could not play cricket half the summer. Another time it was a dressing-case, and Dick must needs go trying to scrape the microscopic hairs off his arm with the razor which it unluckily contained, and of course made a great gash, and cut into one of his veins. A fishing-rod got him into rows with half the keepers round about. A dog given to him could be expected to do nothing else but steal everybody's mutton. Even as a baby, they said, he had tried to swallow his rattle, and in his childhood had more than once half choked himself with the most innocent sweets that could be bought for him. So, when some ill-advised person sent him a chemical chest on his birthday one year, we may be sure that he did not fail to find in it the elements for getting into a scrape.

Dick, along with about half-a-dozen congenial spirits, slept in a small dormitory rather out of the way, and thither that same Monday evening they advised themselves to convey the said chemical chest on the sly. The study of science under any circumstances was not encouraged at Whitminster, especially after bedtime ; but Dick and his compeers were minded to vary the monotony of their classical pursuits by a little

illegal investigation into the powers of nature. To tell the truth, the only chemical combinations in which they took much interest were such as produced light or noise, and as the circumstances were not favourable to the latter class of demonstrations, they confined their attention to the production of the former. While the gas was lit they blew resin through it, and were much delighted with the imitation of lightning thereby produced. When the gas was turned out they burned chloride of sodium in methylated spirits, and laughed to see how ghastly each others' chubby faces appeared in the yellow flames. Then they rubbed phosphorus on the walls, and produced some very striking effects. Having brought the performance to an end by a grand illumination of nitrate of potassium, mixed, somewhat at random, with one or two other substances, so that it was a mercy they were not all blown up, they retired to bed in a pleased frame of mind, and slept peacefully while the night rolled by on her silent chariot-wheels.

But when the returning Aurora had poured the new daylight into their chamber, and the bell was giving stern notice that it was time to get up, and our young friends began to rub their eyes and to look about them, they were horrified to perceive an unexpected

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result of their last night's recreations. The walls were seen to be discoloured in several places where the phosphorus had been applied, and soap and water were found of no avail to set matters right. This was a result our experimental chemists had not bargained for, and certain dismal forebodings began to oppress their hearts. But hope and ingenuity seldom desert the schoolboy mind. A hurried council was held, at which it was hastily determined to take steps for concealing the mischief. Luckily, Prior had a hammer and nails in his play-box, and Wood had some large coloured pictures, supplement sheets of the *Illustrated London News*. These were at once called into requisition, and the pictures were hastily nailed over the tell-tale marks.

"There!" said Wood. "I declare they make the room look quite fine, don't they? Anyhow, if they stay there, nobody will know about the wall being burned."

"It's all right!" chuckled some of the other fellows; but Dick said nothing, and there was an ominous look on his face. He always got found out.

And, indeed, his evil genius had not deserted him; for that very afternoon, Mrs Pearson, attended by the matron, set out on one of her periodical inspections

of the house, and, when she came to our friends' dormitory, she was surprised by their taste for art.

"Why, Mrs Bramble," she said, "these boys are much nicer and neater than they used to be. This was once the most disorderly room in the house."

"They might be better even now," said the matron. "You should see the sweeping Eliza has to do here sometimes, and the floor is nearly always wet with them throwing their sponges at each other."

"Boys will be boys," said Mrs Pearson. "But I like to see these pictures on the walls. It shows that they have some regard for appearances. Only I wish they had fastened them up straight. I hate to see anything crooked. Would you mind, Mrs Bramble, fetching me the hammer and tacks out of the store-room, and we will soon set it all right?"

Mrs Bramble did so, and then the two ladies were not long of finding out that it was all wrong. One after another they removed the pictures from the walls, and discovered underneath certain signs we wot of, proving that the inhabitants of the room were scarcely so careful and orderly as might be desired. Mrs Pearson was horrified and disgusted.

"The little monkeys!" she exclaimed. "I told you the boys of this room were always giving trouble.

Why, it's a mercy they haven't set the house on fire, and we shall never get these marks out. They deserve—I don't know what they deserve ; but I declare it is most provoking, and I shall insist on Mr Vials punishing them very severely."

Their suspicions being thus excited, the two ladies then proceeded to rummage about, and beneath the outward neatness of the little monkeys' dormitory made some startling discoveries, to wit, a dark lantern in Dick's brush-bag, as well as a paper of gunpowder that he had been using for tattooing himself, and a box of matches, articles which produced in Mrs Pearson's mind a vague but strong impression of illegality, insecurity, and anti-Protestantism. Further search disclosed a mouse-trap under one bed, and a collection of half-gnawed dry crusts of bread and cheese beneath an other. Besides, in Wood's drawer were found disjunct fragments of catapults, watch-spring guns, and other missile weapons ; and in Prior's, one or two pieces of soap, which seemed to have been soaked in water and rolled up into balls for offensive purposes.

"Oh!" said the matron ; "so this is where the soap goes. I wondered what could become of it all."

"Yes ; but this must be put a stop to," said Mrs

Pearson, with a frown. "I will go and speak to Mr Vials at once."

So saying, she went off to find Mr Vials, but he happened to be away from home that afternoon, and Mrs Pearson was fain to retire to her own parlour and brood over her just indignation against the "little monkeys."

I am now going to reveal a secret, which was then only suspected by the most knowing members of our little state. There was discord in our government. When Dr Pearson became so ill that he could no longer attend to his duties, Mr Vials had been appointed master of his house, with the understanding that he was to have complete control of studies and discipline, while Mrs Pearson was to manage the domestic affairs. This arrangement did not always work well, for Mr Vials thought our mistress was rather fond of meddling in his jurisdiction, and she considered the master wanting in zeal for the good of the boys according to her views. Mr Vials' ideas of school discipline were somewhat of the old rough-and-tumble order ; he was very severe towards such crimes as laziness, untruthfulness, and disobedience, but he strongly objected to interfere with us in the character of a nursery-maid. Mrs Pearson, on the other hand,

Had the notion that we should be looked after more in the style of a girls' boarding-school, and obliged by law to be as neat and clean and quiet as possible. It was said to be the darling wish of her heart that we should walk out two-and-two like the beasts of a Noah's ark. This innovation she never dared so much as propose, but she did all she could to inculcate upon us, and especially upon the small boys, other virtues which she thought peculiarly becoming. Unfortunately, she found boys such obstinate little heretics, that she could not carry out her plans without appealing for the aid of the secular arm, which in such a cause Mr Vials was generally very loth to grant. Besides, I believe he was a little sore about a weakness for being popular which Mrs Pearson indulged. She was fond of appearing in the character of a beneficent mistress, bestowing smiles and favours in public, though in secret she often urged Mr Vials to be severe; and he thought she tried too much to make it seem that all the kicks of the establishment came from him, and all the halfpence from her. Therefore disagreement between these authorities was not infrequent, and just at that time a serious difference of opinion had arisen. Mrs Pearson, without consulting her colleague, had taken it upon her to issue a

decree that all the boys should fold their nightshirts before coming downstairs, and lay them neatly at the head of their beds. Mr Vialls cared for none of these things, and when requested to enforce this rule, had flatly refused, the consequence of which refusal was that Mrs Pearson found her wishes in the matter generally set at nought, and was much offended.

So, as she sat meditating over the damage the little monkeys, as she called them, had done, she took a very gloomy view of the state of affairs. Everything was going wrong; the boys were getting more impudent and mischievous every day; Mr Vialls was shamefully neglecting his duties; he would be cruel towards a nice, polite boy, whose only fault was that he couldn't learn his repetition, but he didn't care if they destroyed everything in the house; something must be done to put a stop to it. Then Mrs Pearson hit upon a bold idea. Mr Vialls was not at home; the delinquents who had excited her anger were not very big boys; why should she not deal with them herself?

"Yes, we will teach them a lesson, won't we, Lopez?" she exclaimed, addressing her pet monkey, which as usual was her companion in the parlour.

Lopez grinned, and Mrs Pearson went on.

"I declare you would make a better boy than any of them, Lopez. You are always good, aren't you?"

To this sentiment, Lopez chuckled approval, and made a desperate effort to jump at one of the ornaments on the mantelpiece. His mistress held him back, and after thinking for a little, she rang the bell and ordered that the young gentlemen in Master de Wilton's dormitory should appear before her forthwith. Accordingly, as they sat at tea, they were summoned by the maid, to their great disgust and the amusement of their companions.

"Oh! oh! Sent for to the nursery!" was the cry, as, with red faces, they prepared to follow this undignified messenger.

"I knew I should get found out!" whispered Dick, in resigned despair.

"Well, it wasn't you, man," replied Prior. "We were all as bad."

"You tell her, then," said Dick. "You know, I always get equivocating when they row me."

With downcast looks the little tribe of monkeys appeared in presence of Mrs Pearson, who was sitting in state by the fire, holding Lopez by the tail, and gently restraining his efforts to claw the cat. But when he saw the boys, he left the cat in peace and

shrunk back behind his mistress's chair as far as he could.

"Come here," Mrs Pearson said, in a severe voice. "What is this I hear you have been doing in your dormitory?"

Abbing looked surprised, as if this was the first time he had ever heard of such a thing, but most of the countenances before her expressed conscious guilt.

"Which of you was it who burned the walls and then nailed pictures up to conceal what you had done? I suppose you are all to blame. It is just what I had expected of you—a set of disobedient, unruly, untidy, naughty boys. And I find gunpowder, dark lanterns, and all sorts of dreadful things in your room. Are you not ashamed of yourselves?"

Prior undertook to be spokesman, and mumbled out that they were very sorry—that they didn't mean to do any harm—that they wouldn't do it again.

"Oh! of course, of course," said Mrs Pearson. "That's what you always say. But I have determined to put a stop to it. I shall talk to you again to-morrow, but in the meantime you will all be sent to bed. Go at once to your dormitory."

The naughty boys backed out of the parlour, and

held a short consultation over this unexpected sentence. There was no precedent for such a punishment, and they felt very keenly that they should never hear the end of the joke which would be raised against them ; but nobody had the courage to propose to disobey, so they sneaked upstairs to their room, making remarks about Mrs Pearson which scarce were fit for her to hear.

But before they had long to reflect over their misconduct, a deliverer appeared to their rescue from an unexpected quarter. Mr Vials came home, and in due time entered the schoolroom to keep preparation. He soon noticed that certain of the most frisky members of his flock were absent.

"Where are these boys?" he inquired, pointing to the places where our young friends generally sat. Nobody answered at first except by grins, which aroused Mr Vials' suspicions, and made him repeat his question in more peremptory tones.

"Please, sir, I think they have gone to bed."

"Gone to bed ! Why, what is the matter with them ?"

"Mrs Pearson sent them, I think, sir."

"Mrs Pearson !" exclaimed he, bristling up.

We all recognised by well-known signs that he was

very much annoyed, and watched with great interest to see what he would do. First, he took two quick turns up and down the floor; then he made for the door, and stopped half way; then he turned back again; then he called up one of the fellows.

“Beesley, go and tell these boys to dress themselves and come downstairs at once; tell them I said so.”

But before Beesley had gone six steps on this mission, Mr Vialls called him back, and left the room himself, slamming the door after him. A buzz of voices broke out on all sides. We understood that he had gone to have it out with Mrs Pearson, and wondered what would happen, scarcely able to imagine to ourselves the possibility of a quarrel between these two exalted powers. *Tantæ animis cælestibus iræ?*

In a few minutes the released prisoners appeared among us, completing a hasty toilet, and were received with shouts of laughter, in which they tried to join with no very good grace. Presently came Mr Vialls, looking very black, and addressed them in his most dangerous voice—

“I understand that Mrs Pearson has had reason to complain of you. Come to me after preparation. I will see that you are punished in a *proper* manner.”

So our heroes opened their books and set to work, doubtful whether to be pleased or not at this change in the position of affairs. On the one hand, they guessed that they would be punished severely; on the other, they might comfort themselves by thinking that nothing would be done to them which was not strictly dignified, and worthy of their position as schoolboys.

Accordingly, after preparation they repaired to Mr Vials' judgment-room, and received a scolding and an order that they should all stay in next afternoon, and do some work which he would give them. On that afternoon there was to be a regatta, which all the boys wished to attend, so it will be understood that this was a severe sentence, and the little monkeys grumbled bitterly, and declared that Mr Vials was angry with Mrs Pearson, and that they were the victims, as he could not wreak his wrath upon her. *Quidquid delirant Reges*;—can you finish the line, boys?

But there was no help for it, and next day when the others set off for the river bank, these sorrowful urchins, with hateful paper and pens, took their way to a large empty room at the top of the house—the schoolroom was being cleaned out that afternoon—and

waited till Mr Vialls came to set them their work. Boys, however, have a useful habit of not being more sorrowful than is necessary ; so, as Mr Vialls did not come immediately, our friends soon began gallivanting about the room, and tried to keep up their spirits by playing each other little tricks, and performing such small scraps of mischief as came to hand. Dick de Wilton was thus moved to cut his initials on the varnished window-sill ; and then, as his ill-luck would have it, what must he do but look out of the window, and perceive that Master Lopez had been hung out to sun himself against the wall beneath. His cage was suspended by a cord from the next window, which cord Dick found he could reach for the stretching. This discovery he communicated to Prior, and nothing would serve Prior but catching the cord to try if he could pull it. Then somebody else went a little further, and drew the cage up to their window, and having gone so far, the temptation was too strong not to take Lopez out, scratching and biting, and let him loose in the room.

“ Let down the cage again, and shut the window ! ” cried Prior, gleefully. “ Don’t let him out. Oh, what fun ! ”

Thereupon the assembled company began to pelt

Mrs Pearson's pet with a soft ball. Lopez, showing all his teeth and chattering with rage and terror, rushed from corner to corner of the room, and the boys followed with roars of laughter. Up and down, high and low, round and round, Lopez could find no way of escape, till suddenly he sprang into the fireplace and jumped up the chimney.

"Stop him ! stop him !" roared Prior ; but it was too late, for Mr Vials, with an open book in his hand, was standing at the door and saying—

"No more of this ! Go to your places."

The boys hastened to sit down, and he went on—

"You will all write out neatly the first six pages of the syntax rules. None of you is to leave the room till I come back."

As soon as he was gone, the boys, instead of setting to work on their imposition, got up and gathered round the fireplace with anxious faces.

"Hang the brute !" said Prior.

"Catch it first," said Dick.

"Well, we shall catch it if we can't catch it," said Raby, enigmatically.

"It wasn't me that let him out," said Abbing.

"I wish we had thought of the fireplace," said young Pry.

"I wish he hadn't thought of it," said his brother.

"What are we to do?" said everybody, except Dick de Wilton. Instead of talking, he was acting, and was standing in the fireplace with his head and shoulders half way up the chimney, which was a very wide, old-fashioned one.

"I think I can see him," he said, at length. "Here, give me a shove up, somebody."

"Go and look out at the door," said Prior to his younger brother, and then addressed himself to help Dick up into the chimney, which was easily done; for Dick, though he ate as much as anybody, did not seem to flourish on it, and was almost as small and skinny as Lopez himself.

Dick then disappeared, and presently his voice came sounding sepulchrally down—

"He has bolted up; I expect he has got on the roof."

"*Cave!*" shouted Pry from his sentinel post at the door, and the rest of the boys rushed to their seats, just in time to be discovered, pens in hand, as Mrs Pearson sailed into the room, looking very severe at the delinquents.

"Well, boys, I hope you see what is to be got by mischief and disobedience," she began.

The boys said nothing, but hung their heads and looked penitent, though one or two of them could not help glancing towards the chimney in which Dick was bestowed.

“Mr Vialls tells me he has given you an imposition to do. Come, let me see how much you have written of it.”

Prior looked at Wood, and Wood looked at Abbing, and all of them looked at their sheets of paper, on which they had not as yet written a single word. Mrs Pearson thought they were sulky and obstinate, and began to feel displeased. To tell the truth, the good lady's anger seldom lasted long, and feeling sorry that any of us should miss the regatta, she had come to the room with the kindly intention of finding some excuse for getting Mr Vialls to let the little monkeys off the rest of their punishment. But when she found that they had not begun to work at it, and fancied that they meant to show resentment towards her, she was checked in her purpose. Then she noticed Dick's absence, and asked where he was.

“Do you know?” said Wood to Prior, and Prior passed the question on to Abbing, who answered, gravely—

“Oh! he left the room a little ago.”

He half turned his head towards the chimney, and little Pry nearly choked himself in trying not to laugh. Mrs Pearson frowned and said—

“He ought to be here, and you all ought to be at work. I came here hoping to find that you had done part of your imposition, and that I could ask Mr Vials to excuse you for the rest ; but as you have been so idle, I can’t interfere,” and Mrs Pearson reluctantly left the naughty boys to their fate.

Before she was out of earshot, her displeasure was increased by a burst of stifled laughter, which she supposed to be at her expense, whereas it really greeted the appearance of poor Dick’s legs in the fireplace, and in a minute more he stepped out, very sooty, and all to no purpose, for Lopez seemed to have got clear away. The first thing to be done was to clean him, the next to begin the imposition, in case Mr Vials should come to see how they were getting on ; and then our friends had plenty of occupation in discussing the troubles that had already fallen on them and those which were likely to be in store. The boldest of them quailed to think of Mrs Pearson’s wrath when it was discovered that Lopez was missing, and, upon the proposal of Abbing, it was agreed to bind themselves not to tell any one that they had

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meddled with him. Thus they hoped, when an inquiry came to be held over Lopez's empty cage, a verdict of "Disappeared from natural causes," might be returned.

In due time Mr Vialls sent for the impositions, and then the boys ran out and proceeded to hunt about everywhere for that dreadful monkey. But Lopez was nowhere to be found. So when, an hour or two afterwards, Dick was summoned to the master's presence, he thought he knew what was the matter, and his heart sunk within him, so far as his rather sturdy little heart was capable of sinking.

"He's sure to get it all out of me," said poor Dick. "I always 'quivocate. I can't help 'quivocating. I don't mean to do it, but I can't help it."

Considering that Dick was punished as much as any fellow in the school, and cared as little, it was odd that he should be so shamefaced and stammering whenever called upon to answer for himself; and this peculiarity no doubt added to his troubles, for the authorities were apt to take it as an evidence of guilt. This time, he might well be confused when he heard the unexpected charge that was brought against him.

"De Wilton," said Mr Vialls, sharply, "you know

that you are not allowed to throw stones about the house?"

"No; I mean, yes, sir," said Dick, quite thrown off the little balance of mind he retained by this beginning.

"Did you throw a stone at one of the chimney-pots this afternoon?"

"The chimney-pots!" stammered Dick, not able to make out what tack the master was on.

"Yes; now be careful, don't equivocate."

"I don't think—I don't remember," said Dick, amazed.

"You do just as well not to remember sometimes," said Mr Vials, drily. "Mrs Pearson tells me that she was walking in the garden this afternoon, when she heard a crash, and one of the chimney-pots fell down at her feet, almost striking her on the head. All the boys were at the regatta, except those who were writing an imposition for me upstairs; and she says that when she went into the room a little before, you were not there. How was that? Didn't I tell you not to leave the room?"

"I didn't sir—at least"——

"Ah! here we have it! At least *what*?"

Dick hung his head and said nothing, for he did

not like to say that he was up the chimney, for fear of further questions.

"It is plain that you have disobeyed me, and I suppose you have been trying to annoy Mrs Pearson by a silly trick. Well, De Wilton, you have brought it on yourself ; you must stop in again on Saturday afternoon and do another imposition. When will you learn to keep out of scrapes ?"

Dick's mouth opened, but no words came forth, and, finding that Mr Vialls had no more to say, he made his way out of the room, and went to astonish his friends by relating what had passed.

"Why didn't you tell him that you didn't knock down the chimney-pot ?"

"I tried to," said Dick, "but he told me not to equivocate. I don't know how it is, I always equivocate."

"Of course it must have been that brute Lopez."

"Well, she is sure to find out about it, and then we shall all get into a nice row."

All the evening the little monkeys were in expectation of such a catastrophe, and some of them felt as if they would be relieved to get it over ; but they were agreeably or disagreeably disappointed. Mrs Pearson had gone out to tea, and did not come home

till late, when she received the sad news that her pet was missing.

"These wretched boys!" was the first thing she said.

But no; the servants said they believed Lopez had been stolen by a tramp who had been seen prowling about the house, and had made off with suspicious alacrity when the gardener had been sent for to deal with him. Cook was called as evidence, and deposed that this man, after begging a bit of bread, had gone to the wall where Lopez's cage was hanging in the garden, and against which a ladder happened to be standing, and that he had remained loafing about there till the maid ran out to fetch the gardener. When they came back, the tramp was gone, and so was the monkey.

There was a weak point in this evidence, but it was not perceived by the female court who tried the case and forthwith pronounced the poor tramp guilty. Mrs Pearson lost no time in sending a description of the man to the police-office, and also offering a reward by advertisement in the papers for the recovery of her favourite. Then for two or three days she was anxiously expecting news of him, but none came, and his mistress was inconsolable. We know who could

have given her such news. These persons, however, thought it would be best for them to hold their tongues on the subject, unless they were obliged to speak. They had had their fun, such as it was, and noped not to have to pay for it.

But more troubles were to come. It is a pity that these little monkeys do not reflect that what they call *fun* is likely to end in annoyance to other people if not to themselves. It was on Wednesday evening that Lopez was found to be missing, and on Thursday morning the gardener brought Mrs Pearson tidings of a fresh disaster. She had just had a little conservatory made in her garden, and two or three of the panes in it were found to be broken. Of course this must be the doing of De Wilton and his friends. They would have a grudge against her for getting them into a scrape ; theirs was the only one of the boys' windows which looked out into the garden ; had she not, with her own eyes, seen in their drawers catapaults and lead bullets, kept for the purpose of breaking windows ? They were trying to see how much they could vex her, and perhaps it was they who had instigated the tramp to steal Lopez. These suspicions she laid before Mr Vialls, and he sent for the suspected boys, *Pc.* asked them if they had broken the glass in the

conservatory. All denied it, and Dick's denial was as confident as any this time, for he was bolder in company than when put in the dock by himself. So the master went back to Mrs Pearson to report that he could find no fault with the little monkeys in this matter.

"But they must have done it," cried Mrs Pearson. "Do you mean to say that you are not going to punish any one for this piece of wilful mischief and spite?"

"Well, what would you have me do?" said Mr Vials. "I can't refuse to take the boys' words. There is really no evidence against them."

"No evidence! Why, to me it is as plain as possible, and here is another trick of theirs! Eliza says she is sure some one drank some of the milk in the pantry last night, and to-day the pail is found turned over and the milk on the floor. Did you ever hear of such abominable conduct?"

"I can't see how the boys could have meddled with the milk, even if any of them would have done so. How can they get to the pantry?"

"Oh! trust them for finding a way of getting to any place where there is mischief to be done! If they didn't do it, who did, will you tell me that, Mr Vials?"

"The cat," said Mr Vials, trying to soften the unpleasant tone which the conversation was taking, by a small joke.

"The cat! Of course it was the cat! It was always my poor Lopez that used to be accused of everything before he was stolen. But it's no use talking to you, Mr Vials. I see you are determined, as usual, to contradict me. You never fall into my views about the boys. No wonder the house is in such an unsatisfactory state!"

"Excuse me, Mrs Pearson. I try my best to fall in with your views; but, if I am to tell the truth, I think you too often wish me to interfere in trifling matters, which, in a school like this, had better be left alone, or dealt with by the boys themselves. So long as I am responsible for the discipline of the house, I will punish the boys when they deserve it, but I will consider it my duty to protect them from injustice or unnecessary interference."

"I suppose you are never unjust!" said Mrs Pearson.

"I hope not," said Mr Vials. "But, to speak plainly, I think you are trying to make me so in the present instance."

Mrs Pearson frowned and drew herself up.

"I think this conversation may as well end here," she said ; and indeed it was high time that it should.

In the meanwhile the little monkeys were no less perplexed. None of them, probably, had ever read the story of *Frankenstein* ; but they recognised that they had let loose on the world a monster which might go on committing who knew what atrocities, of which the blame would be as likely as not to come upon them. They wished that they had confessed at once their share in *Lopez's* disappearance, but it seemed too late to do so now ; and, as the next best thing to be done, they armed themselves with missile weapons, and hunted all over every part of the premises to which they had access, but without so much as catching a sight of the monkey's tail. Dick went further. On the Friday morning, fancying that he saw something stirring in a little shrubbery which lay on the other side of the railing separating the boys' approach from the trim, flower-bordered walk which led to the *Pearsons'* private door, and to us was forbidden ground, he committed a misdemeanour by jumping over and beating the bushes on the other side, till Mrs *Pearson* caught sight of him, and rapped sharply on the drawing-room window, whereupon Dick beat a hasty retreat without finishing his search.

That afternoon a policeman came to tell Mrs Pearson that the tramp could not be found, nor the monkey. Dick and his friends came to hear of this, and were much impressed. The affair was getting serious now that a policeman had been imported into it. In their innocence they believed that the police never failed to find out everything, and then the consequences would be so much more dreadful! Some of them were of opinion that they should unburden their minds to one of the big fellows. But the majority, with the fear of the police before their eyes, voted to say nothing for at least another day.

Scarcely had the policeman gone than the gardener came to inform his mistress of a fresh calamity.

"Will you come and see, ma'am, what some of these daft laddies have been doing next?" said the honest Scotchman, in hot indignation; and he led her to the neatly-kept walk upon which she had lately seen Dick trespassing.

Here was a sight to make man and mistress justly indignant. Some beautiful tulips had here and there been broken down, or were lying on the ground snapped off their stalks. It was a piece of pure mischief, for the perpetrator had not even taken the trouble to carry one of the flowers away. The newly-

painted railings, too, were scratched and smeared in several places, and Mrs Pearson's first thought was that Dick had on a new suit of clothes, from which it would be difficult to remove the stains of green paint.

"To think of him having the impudence to do it under my very eyes!" she exclaimed, as she went indoors, after sympathising with the gardener and assuring him that his ruined tulips should be amply avenged.

Mrs Pearson was inclined to be more unhappy than angry this time. Her pet monkey, which she would not have given for a wilderness of Dick de Wiltons, was lost to her; and these little monkeys who remained were the plagues of her life. It was plain that Dick and his friends nourished a spite against her, and were doing all they could to insult and annoy her, thinking no doubt that Mr Vials would not interfere. Then she remembered how she had nursed Dick through the measles, putting him into her own spare room, and bringing him oranges and jellies with her own hand. She had done so much for him, not because he was a favourite of hers, but because he wasn't, and her conscience had reproached her with having a prejudice against him, as a little monkey. She had made a point of

being very kind to Dick at that time, and had let him handle her best books with these dreadful fingers of his, and had had him to sit with her in the parlour while he was getting better, though every moment she was on pins and needles as to what he was going to do next with his hands and heels. She had not even complained when he broke one of her drawing-room chairs by swinging it upon one leg. And this was the return he made her? Mrs Pearson half resolved to send for him and remonstrate with him on his conduct, hoping thus to touch his heart, and to show Mr Vials that the boys could be influenced by better means than the cane. But as she thought over the persistent way in which Dick seemed to have been playing pranks against her peace of mind, the sentiment of justice again rose up in her breast, and she felt that in Dick's case punishment ought to come first and penitence afterwards. Should she speak to one of the prefects, and persuade him to deal with the delinquent, as he might well do. But the prefects and Mrs Pearson were never very harmonious, and at that time they were disaffected to the government in consequence of a dispute about certain rights and privileges of theirs which had recently been called in question. Besides, she knew that they had no legal

power to punish the boys in serious matters without Mr Vialls' authority, and that he was jealous of his prerogative in this respect. So there was nothing for it but to take her case to Mr Vialls again, which she did before the boys went to bed.

"I hope you won't say there is no evidence now," she said. "I tell you I saw him with my own eyes."

"I am sorry to hear it," said Mr Vialls, somewhat stiffly, for he was annoyed at the way in which Mrs Pearson seemed to be claiming a triumph over him. "I did not suppose that any of our boys would have shown such bad feeling towards you ; but I think I can undertake that it shan't happen again ;" and Dick would have quaked in his shoes if he had heard the tone of this ominous speech.

"I hope so," said Mrs Pearson. "Surely, Mr Vialls, you can prevent me from being insulted in my own house. It must be put a stop to somehow."

Mr Vialls was as much annoyed as Mrs Pearson. Seeing how seriously concerned she was about these little pieces of mischief, he half thought that she must be right in supposing that some of the boys had a fixed design to annoy her, and that he might have been wrong in paying too little attention to her complaints against them. So his brows knit severely as

he sent for Dick, and his hand went into the pocket where he kept his keys, among them the key of a certain cupboard which Dick knew only too well.

Dick was not astonished when he received the summons. He at once recognised the hand of destiny and of Lopez, and without a murmur went to meet whatever new misfortune might be awaiting him; and the chorus of little monkeys ranged themselves opposite Mr Vialls' gates, yet not too near, and were eager to interrogate their leader on his return.

"Well, did you catch it?"

"No, but he's in an awful wax."

"What's the matter now?"

"He says I have been smashing down some flowers in the garden."

"The brute!" exclaimed the chorus, not thinking of Mr Vialls, but of Lopez. "And what did you say?"

"I don't know what I said. I got flustered."

"And what did he say?"

"He said I was equivocating."

"And what's he going to do?"

"He's going to lick me to-morrow morning if I don't confess."

"What a shame!"

"He said he was sure I had something to do with it."

"And what else did he say?"

"He said it must be put a stop to."

"And what are we to do?"

"I don't know," said Dick.

"Tell him all about it," said Prior.

"Then we shall all catch it," said Abbing

"I wish any of us could catch it," said Raby, making an untimely joke.

Long and anxiously did the little monkeys deliberate on the course which it behoved them to pursue. It certainly seemed to be a pity, as Abbing suggested in more homely language, to offer up six victims on the altar of justice, when one would do just as well, and that one was as used to the sacrifice as eels to skinning. But then they did not know that Lopez would cease his mysterious pranks, and the thought that he would continue to haunt the house and get them into trouble was not to be borne. So it was proposed that if Dick found Mr Vialls prepared to proceed to extremities, he should tell the whole story and have done with it. To this Dick objected, saying that he was sure to make a mess of the story, and be accused of equivocating. Then it was boldly re-

solved that the whole chorus should attend Dick and help him to explain matters; and our friends made up their minds to spend a bad quarter of an hour with Mr Vialls next morning.

While these boys were thinking of Mr Vialls, he was thinking of them, and his thoughts were not happy. The little monkeys would have been surprised to learn how much they had it in their power to worry him. He was severe and sometimes hasty, and he made no pretence of being otherwise, but tried to do what he thought his duty straight on, without caring whether he were popular or not with the boys. But he wished to be just, and he was not sure what justice required of him in the case of Dick de Wilton. Long after he had gone to bed he was still turning the matter over in his mind. On the one hand, from what Mrs Pearson had told him, and from Dick's embarrassed manner when questioned, it seemed plain to him that the boy had been doing what he was accused of, or something very like it; and yet, from what he knew of Dick, he did not suppose him capable of telling a downright lie, and Dick had positively denied that he had touched the flowers or done any mischief in the garden walks, though he admitted he had been there for a purpose which he

would not explain. Then these boys had apparently been playing tricks to annoy Mrs Pearson, and Mr Vialls felt her reproach that he had been neglecting his duty, and half believed that it might be his fault that the boys were emboldened to treat her in this way. But what should he have done? She was always urging him to punish boys for what to him seemed very small offences; and if he did consent to punish them, as likely as not she would come to beg them off, so as to impress them with an idea of her affection for them. This wasn't fair, Mr Vialls thought, but still it was too bad that the boys should destroy her property with impunity. There was no help for it; an example must be made, and Dick, as usual, had managed to run in the way and offer himself as scapegoat.

But Mr Vialls still allowed himself to be worried, and lay for hours thinking that the man who had to correct the exercises and the antics of little monkeys had a very hard time of it. The day was dawning, and the little monkeys themselves had long forgotten their troubles in slumber, when their tyrant at length closed his eyes to dream that he was a boy, and Dick was a master, and that Dick was condemning him to dreadful punishments for losing his temper.

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But before Mr Vialls had slept long, he was awakened by the ringing of the schoolhouse bell, and wearily turned his head on the pillow to look at his watch.

"Surely it can't be time yet. Twenty minutes past three o'clock! Why, what does this mean?"

He rubbed his eyes, and tried to persuade himself that he was still dreaming. But no—beyond doubt there was the familiar bell sounding from its turret above his head, and giving notice that it was time to get up. Then Mr Vialls thought his watch must have stopped, but a glance at the grey morning light showed him that it was still very early. And now that he came to listen to the bell, it was jangling in a fitful, irregular, uncertain way, which was very different from the sharp, business-like, peremptory tone that it generally adopted.

"Another of these little monkeys' tricks," groaned Mr Vialls, feeling very tired and cross.

He listened a little longer, but the bell went on. At length, with an exclamation of anger, he jumped out of bed, hurriedly put on some of his clothes, and ran upstairs to the landing where the bell-rope hung. The bell had stopped ringing, and several of the boys were coming out of their rooms to ask each other if it was really time to get up.

"What is the meaning of this, Blackburn?" asked Mr Vials, angrily.

"I don't know, sir," said Blackburn. "I came to see who was ringing the bell."

The boys looked at each other, and Mr Vials noticed a glance of intelligence passing between the Priors and De Wilton and Wood. Besides, it did not escape him that the boys of this room were all present arrayed in their shirts and trousers, whereas the few others standing about had nothing on but their nightshirts. Mr Vials was sharp, and thought he would show his sharpness.

"De Wilton," he said, "you and the other boys in your dormitory will go down to my room. I have something to say to you."

The meaning of this invitation was unmistakable, and Mr Vials was confirmed in his suspicions when he saw that these boys obeyed at once, without showing the surprise which might have been expected from them. They evidently were not unconscious of guilt; only Abbing ran back to put on his jacket, which speaks well for Abbing's prudence and presence of mind.

Mr Vials' room was unswept, untidied, uncomfortable; the grate was filled with cold ashes, and the

supper-tray still stood on the table in the middle of a confusion of books and papers. There assembled these half-dozen small boys, half-dressed and half-awake, shivering in the chilly air of a spring morning. Mr Vialls followed in his dressing-gown, looking angry and determined.

"This must be put a stop to," he said. "One of you boys, if not all of you, has been trying for some days to annoy us by silly tricks, and I can't allow it to go on any longer. I am going to teach you a lesson which you won't forget in a hurry."

Mr Vialls looked sternly at the little monkeys, who were duly overawed and huddled together, as if to take silent counsel with each other. Then he asked, sharply—

' De Wilton, do you know who rang that bell? "

"No, sir," stammered Dick. "I mean—I think—I"—

"Take care how you trifle with me," cried Mr Vialls, with a frown. "Be sure you don't equivocate;" and he brought out his keys, and was picking out a certain one. "I must know who rang that bell. I feel certain it was one of you."

At this moment, as if to warn him not to be too certain about anything, the bell began to ring again.

Mr Vials started and looked round. Yes—there could be no mistake about it. Ding-dong, dong-ding, the bell was going in the same irregular, fitful way, as if it had not made up its mind what to say, or were “equivocating,” as sly Raby whispered to Dick de Wilton. And—no!—indeed, more than one of the little monkeys were grinning in his very face.

“This must be put a stop to,” cried Mr Vials, rushing out of the room and up the stairs, followed soon by the band of little monkeys.

But before they reached the landing where the bell-rope hung, Mr Vials had satisfied himself that no one was touching it, while the bell still rang on, and the boys began to peep out of their rooms, in no very good-humour at being again disturbed. The master singled out another key from the bunch which he held in his hand, and made his way up a narrow flight of stairs to the little open turret on the roof where the bell hung. He unlocked it and looked in, and instantly something darted out, making its way between his legs and flying downstairs. Mr Vials stood stock-still with amazement; then there was a shout of triumph from the boys below, and he ran down to find that Lopez, looking dirty, forlorn, and submissive, had been made an easy capture.

"Why, it is Mrs Pearson's monkey!" he said. "I thought it had been stolen."

"It must have got loose, sir," said Abbing. "And look, it is all covered with green paint and earth. It must have been Lopez that broke the flowers."

"Yes, sir. De Wilton only went over the railing to look for something," said somebody, pleading Dick's cause.

"And if Lopez could get up to the roof, perhaps he threw down the chimney-pot on Mrs Pearson's head," said somebody else.

"What a brute!" cried the chorus of tailless monkeys.

At this point, one of the maid-servants, whose duty it was to ring the bell in the morning, arrived to see who could be usurping her functions; and, with some words of explanation, Lopez was given to her in charge, and conveyed back to his cage, that for three days had stood empty in Mrs Pearson's parlour. And it may be as well to say here, that Mrs Pearson was so pleased to recover her favourite, that she made no further inquiries, and never said another word about the tricks of which unlucky Dick had been supposed to be the author.

When the cause of all this excitement had been

removed, Mr Vialls sent the boys off to their rooms, except Dick, whom he drew aside to have a word with.

“De Wilton, my boy,” he said, “I am afraid I have nearly been doing you an injustice.”

Dick looked up into the master’s face and then looked down. He was not at all comfortable under this sympathy, and felt he should like to tell Mr Vialls that he was more to blame in the matter than might be supposed. But he held his tongue, distrusting his own powers of speech, or doubtful whether he ought to let out a secret which belonged to others as well as to himself, or perhaps honestly afraid of tumbling back into a scrape, and thinking it best to leave well alone.

“I am very sorry I suspected you, and very glad I found out the truth before punishing you, as I intended to do,” Mr Vialls went on, in a kindly tone. “I believe I have been too hasty in judging you, but there is a lesson which you also might take from this. Don’t you see what a serious thing it is to have a bad character? You are always in trouble ; scarcely a day passes but what one has to find fault with you for some piece of carelessness and disobedience, and you don’t seem to mind what is said or done to you ; so,

whenever any mischief is found out, you are pretty sure to be accused of it, and we are apt to believe that you must be the person to be punished. I have punished you till I am tired of it. Aren't you getting tired of it, De Wilton? Aren't you getting old enough and sensible enough to understand how foolish and wrong it is to be always in scrapes. Suppose, now, you make up your mind to turn over a new leaf, and show us that you can do what you are told and attend to your work, without all this scolding and punishment. Come, De Wilton, I believe you are a better fellow than most people think, and I wish you would promise for the future to behave so that when monkeys play tricks you should be the last person to be suspected of them. Will you?"

"I'll try," said Dick, looking up again, and Mr Vialls saw something like a tear in each of his eyes, where tears were seldom seen, even under the most painful circumstances.



ST VALENTINE'S DAY.



ST VALENTINE'S DAY.

“**P**HILLIPS, bring me that book, if you please.
No—not that one—the one you have
underneath the desk.”

So Phillips had to bring out his book, and take it up to Mr Nowell, who, arrayed in cap and gown, was sitting in his desk, and had been sharply watching the boy for some minutes.

“Oh!” said the master, looking at the book, and then looking hard at Phillips. “Byron’s poems! So this is the way you do your algebra, is it?”

It was; and Phillips couldn’t well say that it was a very good way.

“There has been a great deal too much of this sort of thing lately, Phillips, and I am sorry to see it. Will you stop and speak to me after school?”

"Very well, sir," mumbled Phillips, and walked back to his seat, looking very red, and feeling very angry; for two or three small boys in one of the other forms were turning round and grinning at his discomfiture; and when one has got into tails and the fifth form, one doesn't like to be laughed at.

The Rev. Mr Nowell was the new second master at Whitminster School, and also took duty at the Minster as substitute for old Mr Holmes, the minor canon, whose age and infirmities seldom allowed him to go out of doors. The boys did not quite understand Mr Nowell as yet, for he was very quiet and reserved in his manner; but they had already had opportunities of coming to the conclusion that he was a great deal too strict. And when school was dismissed, Phillips—who of course was our old friend Jemima Anne—stopped behind in no very good spirits, and with duly demure look awaited what the master had to say to him.

"Phillips," said Mr Nowell, after carefully putting away his cap and gown, locking his desk, and rolling up his umbrella, "I am sorry to see you so idle and inattentive as you often are. I have several times had to find fault with you lately, and you don't appear to mind the hints which I have given you."

Phillips had nothing to say.

"Now I am going to speak to you frankly, and if you take my advice now, you may some day be much obliged to me for it. I see plainly that, instead of giving up your mind to your work, you are allowing it to run upon things which you had much better leave alone."

Phillips blushed.

"My dear boy, I can guess pretty well the state of your mind. But you must make an effort, and shake off these feelings. So long as you indulge them, you are wasting precious time which you never can recall. I hope you will believe me, and try to attend better to your work. If not, I must find other means of securing that you do not neglect your duty. Do you understand, Phillips?"

"Yes, sir."

Then the master went on kindly and firmly to impress upon him those truths which parents and teachers so often tell young people, and which they so seldom believe, till they find out for themselves—that we can only reap what we have sowed—that good fruit does not grow upon weeds—that in time we shall come to regret it bitterly if we have not taken pains, while we could, to secure a good crop.

Phillips, of course, listened meekly, and indeed was not unimpressed, for he was of a pliant and affectionate disposition ; and while Mr Nowell was speaking, he made up his mind that he would in future try to throw his mind more into his work. But there was a sting at the tail of the speech which poisoned all Phillips' good resolutions.

"Grammars and dictionaries may seem very dull and prosaic things," said Mr Nowell ; "but it is your duty to attend to such things for the present ; and duty is only dull so long as you choose to think it so. Try, Phillips, to concentrate your interest in your work, and give up scribbling nonsense, and thinking yourself so clever that you can do without learning."

Here was the sting ! Phillips, it should be known, was possessed by the idea that he was destined to be the Byron of his day, and he didn't at all like to hear his pursuit of the Muses called "scribbling nonsense." That very morning, instead of attending to the mere grammar and metre of his Horace, he had been employed in drinking deep of its spirit, and having mixed the same with that of Byron, had manufactured the following lines, which he had scarcely finished when he was called up by Mr Nowell :—

" So full of fond desire my heart,
It fain would burst in song ;
I long to hide myself apart,
And shun the vulgar throng.

" The tyrant's frown, the coward's fear,
I both alike despise ;
Their threats with scornful smile I hear,
And see with dauntless eyes.

" Wealth's snares and fashion's silly shows
I also do despise ;
I love to roam where weeps the rose,
And where the myrtle sighs.

" Far from the hum of men I'll pass,
And build a tower of fame,
That shall, with tongue of lasting brass,
Tell to the sky my name.

" Do thou, O Lydia ! only deign
To smile upon my woe ;
Then Fortune ne'er can give me pain,
Since I have loved thee so."

So Phillips hardened his soft heart, and it was in a bitter and resentful frame of mind that he went out from Mr Nowell's presence, and strode across the playground, vowing that some day he would show the master how much he was mistaken in thinking so meanly of his poetical powers.

"He's a fool!" declared Phillips; and repeated to himself some of Byron's lines which had sunk deeper

into his sentimental mind than ever quadratic equations seemed likely to do:—

“Of narrow brain, yet of a narrower soul,
Pomposus holds us in his harsh control ;
Pomposus, by no social virtue swayed,
With florid jargon and with vain parade.
With noisy nonsense and new fangled rules,
Such as were ne’er before enforced in schools,
Mistaking pedantry for learning’s laws,
He governs, sanctioned but by self-applause.”

Phillips did not know that his favourite poet lived to regret and apologise for this insult to his old master. But he thought he did know that Lord Byron and he were very fine fellows, who ought not to be judged by the same rules as applied to ordinary mortals.

“It is all very well,”—such were his reflections,—“it is all very well for stupid fellows to plod away at their lessons. If they did not do this, they would grow up to be ignorant, useless brutes, for they have none of the inspiration of genius, which teaches us things far more valuable than Euclid and Latin Grammar. ‘Scribbling nonsense,’ indeed! Some day, when I have become famous, he will know better. But we are always misunderstood and ill-treated. Byron was, and Chatterton and Keats. I suppose I too must expect to be oppressed and persecuted.”

At this point, Phillips perceived a small boy in front of him, and called out very peremptorily—

“Here, young Wood! just take my books up to Pearson’s.”

Having thus got rid of the algebra and the Horace which bulged out the pockets of his coat, and prevented it from sitting well, Phillips proceeded to pay some attention to his personal appearance. First, carefully looking round to see that he was not observed, he drew a garnet ring out of his pocket, and put it on his little finger. Then he cleaned his nails with a penknife stained by much apple juice. Then he ran his fingers through his hair. Then he arranged his watch chain in a graceful festoon. Then he dusted his boots with his handkerchief, and selected a clean end of this article to stick out for public inspection. Lastly, he covered his left hand with a somewhat dirty lavender kid-glove, holding its fellow in his right; and thus accoutred, marched to the Minster Green, and boldly knocked at the queer, cosy, ivy-grown little house of old Mr Holmes, the minor canon. The door having been opened, he inquired if Mrs Holmes was at home, and was shown in.

Any readers who may have been acquainted with Whitminster in these days, will know that the old minor canon’s wife had died some ten years past,

leaving an only son, then with his regiment in India. The old gentleman was greatly afflicted by this loss, and before long, he received another severe blow, and also a blessing, which seemed almost to compensate for his troubles. Returning home on furlough, Captain Holmes' ship was almost destroyed by a hurricane, and with great difficulty reached the Mauritius, where the passengers were put on shore for two or three weeks, till the ship's injuries should be repaired. In this short space of time, the captain contrived to fall deeply in love with a young lady who was scarcely sixteen, and looked still younger. She was one of a large family, whose parents were pretty well used to parting with their daughters ; so the end of it was, that Captain Holmes was married to Miss Rose Copeland, and took her home with him as a surprise for his old father. But the poor girl's experience of married life was as short as her courtship. On the way home, her husband died of fever, and his widow landed in England, without knowing a soul in the country. One of the passengers, however, was acquainted with old Mr Holmes. He escorted the minor canon's daughter-in-law to Whitminster, and before the father and the widow had dried the tears which they shed together over him whom they had both loved so dearly, the old man found that he could love Rose with all his

heart ; and she consented to make his home her own, and be to his dull life like a little beam of sunshine from the south. So she remained in the little old house on the Minster Green, and, as the minor canon's infirmities increased, became more and more his only comfort and delight. Nor was this all ; for when young Mrs Holmes had lived three or four years at Whitminster, she was a favourite with every man, woman, and child in the place, so sweet and kind and unselfish was she, as one had only to look into her face to discover. The boys of the school took a special interest in her, for Captain Holmes' letter announcing his marriage, and requesting a holiday for his old school in honour of the event, had arrived and been duly attended to, before the sad end of the story was known.

Now comes a great secret. Phillips was not less charmed than other people by her attractions ; indeed more so, for after having been in love with several young ladies in succession, some of whom had scorned his attentions, while others had proved unworthy of them, he had at length concentrated his affections on the young widow, and vowed to endow her with the devotion of his lifetime. So we may understand that it was with no ordinary feelings that he was shown into Mrs Holmes' little drawing-room and sat down to wait for her appearance.

Of all days in the year, this was the thirteenth of February, and the first thing Phillips' eye fell on was a valentine lying on the writing-table, with an envelope beside it, of which the back was turned under. It was a very simple and pretty valentine, two silver hearts united by a golden knot—nothing more, except that beneath was written in a lady's hand, "*To dearest A.*"

This sight almost took away Phillips' breath. For whom could this token of love be intended, unless—His own christian name was Joseph Alwyn, but when he first discovered that the gods had made him poetical, he had dropped the Joseph, and was known as Alwyn to Mrs Holmes and other friends who had a tenderer regard for his feelings than his schoolfellows. Who, then, could be "*dearest A.*?" Was it possible—that?—It was only by accident that he had seen so much, but he longed to see more, and was wondering whether it would be proper to turn over the envelope and put an end to his suspense by knowing to whom it was addressed, when the door opened, and his fair lady entered the room.

Nobody could deny that she was fair. She had a round happy sensible face, and a pair of the kindest blue eyes, and a frank friendly, smile which were calculated to make a most favourable impression on less impressionable beings than Master Alwyn Phillips.

Moreover, she was at the first glance seen to be one of these women to whom poetical souls are not as a rule very violently attracted, but about whom practical people feel at once inclined to say, "Happy is the home that has reared such a daughter! happy the house that is governed by such a mistress!"

By her father-in-law's desire, she wore no widow's cap or other sign of deep mourning, but was dressed plainly, though elegantly, in silver-grey, with no ornament except her wedding-ring. And unless you had noticed that ring, you might have supposed her a merry girl fresh from school, who had never known any of the real troubles of life, so young and cheerful did she look. Yet she was past twenty, and had loved her husband dearly, though she made no great display of her sorrow for him, to the scandal of certain old ladies of Whitminster, who, however, forgot to speak against her, when once they came to know how loving she was. Well might Phillips lose his heart, and now stand blushing and fidgeting on the hearthrug, as Mrs Holmes advanced to meet him.

"I am so sorry I have kept you waiting," she said. "I have been obliged to be with my father," (she always called him father); "he is not able to leave his room to-day."

Perhaps this was intended for a very gentle hint

that Phillips' visit was not altogether convenient at that hour ; but Alwyn didn't see the matter in this light, and, on the contrary, it struck him as a token of her great regard for him, that she should leave Mr Holmes at all to come and see him. Nor did it escape him that as she sat down by the writing-table, she hurriedly threw a sheet of blotting-paper over the valentine, as if she had some reason for hiding it from his eyes. Phillips thought she was an angel, and that he must be "dearest A."

"I am sorry I have not been to see you for so long," he said, looking anxiously to see that only the clean part of his handkerchief was sticking out of his pocket. "But I have been awfully busy. You can't think how hard Nowell works us."

"I suppose you don't thank him for that," said she, laughing.

"He's a horrid man!" said Phillips, looking interesting, in the hope of being pitied.

"Oh, I won't have you say that!" cried Mrs Holmes. "I am sure Mr Nowell tries very hard to do his work, which is more than some people can say, Alwyn. At all events he has been very kind to—to my father, and I won't have a word spoken against him."

"Oh, he's not a bad fellow in his way," admitted

Phillips, when he heard his charmer speak thus. There was no room in his heart for angry feelings. If she loved and appreciated him, what need he care if all the Nowells in the world tried to snub and persecute him? He forgave them all.

There was now a pause in the conversation, and Mrs Holmes thought to fill it up by producing a plate of cake, which her experience of schoolboy visits had taught her to be generally a very useful resource under such circumstances. But Phillips would have none of her dainties; indeed, he felt rather hurt by the offer, and at once plunged desperately into a subject more suited to the occasion.

"Have you sent any valentines this year?" he asked, glancing towards the table.

"No; but I am going to send one," she said, with a smile, and, Phillips thought, with a blush. "Are you doing anything in that way? I suppose so."

"I am going to send *one*," said Phillips, with a beating heart, "and I hope to get one."

"I expect one, too, and only one, so we shall be equally well off," said Mrs Holmes. "But do you know, Alwyn, I must really go back to my father. He is not so well as usual to-day, and he desired me to give you his kind regards, and to say he hoped

you would come back another day—*soon*, remember—and have tea with us.”

In some confusion, Phillips rose to take this hint, but first he summoned up courage to say—

“Will you do me one favour? Will you give me one of your flowers?”

“What dandies you Grammar School boys are!” laughed Mrs Holmes, as she pulled one or two crocuses from a flower-pot on the window-sill. “There; you can think they are roses, and I wish they were, for I don’t like this cold dreary winter weather. Stop, I shall only give them you on one condition. Will you promise me not to think ill of Mr Nowell, and to try to do your lessons for him well, and not give him trouble?”

“Oh, yes!” exclaimed Phillips, eagerly, though it did cross his mind that such a promise was rather prosaic, and that none of Byron’s heroines would have talked in that way.

“Then, here are your crocuses. Be sure to put them in your button-hole when you go to the Minster, though by the by I am afraid they won’t keep till Sunday.”

“I shall keep them for ever,” said Phillips, sentimentally. “I mean to put them in my desk, not my button-hole.”

"Oh, do you collect dried plants? How nice! I used to have a collection, and it was most interesting. I really think I must begin again. But there is my father's bell. You will excuse me—won't you?"

Phillips muttered something very tender as he moved towards the door, and the widow tripped away upstairs. But bethinking herself that her dismissal of the boy might seem rather abrupt, in the kindness of her heart she turned round when half way up, to cry after him—

"Be sure to come again soon."

"She loves me!" thought Phillips, making his way out on the Green, and gazing with delight on the little bunch of crocuses she had placed in his hands.

Indeed they seemed like roses to him, for all the world at that moment wore a rose-coloured look, and the dull February drizzle which was beginning to fall was no less delicious than the balmiest day in June, so far as he knew anything about it. Though, by the by, he was not so pre-occupied that he did not remember to take off the lavender kid-gloves, and put them away in his pocket, now that there was no further occasion for them.

"Oh," murmured Phillips, as he strode along towards the Schoolhouse, where the chances were he would be late for dinner,—“oh, that I only lived

in the olden days of chivalry, and were able to do some noble deed to show how much I loved her! For her sake I could face the fiercest tyrant or forgive my bitterest enemy. But in these days there is no chance for a true knight to prove his courage and kindness in the service of his mistress!"

At that moment, Phillips' meditations were interrupted by a little dog, which was being chased by a baker's boy, and ran in between our hero's legs in such a way as almost to upset him. As it was, he staggered against the wall and grazed his arm, which made him so angry that he called the dog names and threw stones at it. Then he went home to dinner, and, like other love-sick swains, must be supposed not to have eaten a good one, but on this point I am unable to speak with certainty.

But after dinner I am sure that he betook himself to the practice of no frivolous amusement. His mind was now taken up with one project. He must send her a valentine. He had not thought of it before, and, indeed, he had no money, but he made a great effort, and sold a set of gilt shirt-studs to Beesley for a shilling. With this sum he repaired, after school, to the best shop in the town—for love made him bold to go out of bounds—and there selected a suitable and seasonable sheet adorned with much silver lace, round

which a border of fat Cupids sprawled among flowers of all shapes and hues, and in the middle one large moss-rose in the form of a heart, which was contrived so as to be lifted up and disclose a beautiful little picture, wherein a gentleman with a pink waistcoat was leading a lady in a blue bonnet to a church that, according to the rules of perspective, must have been about the size of a band-box. There were none of the usual poetical commonplaces at the bottom of this valentine. Phillips took care of that. Was he not himself a son of Parnassus? and had he not the proud privilege of saluting his lady-love with a few remarks of his own composition, which she, of course, would prize a thousand times more than the cold and formal efforts of a hireling muse?

So, for the best part of the evening, when he ought to have been doing his Euripides, Phillips, with his study door locked and quite a pile of paper before him, was employed in cudgelling out of his brains some rhymes appropriate to the state of his affections and the scene that had that day taken place between himself and the widow. He was considerably puzzled by the crocus, which he wished to be a prominent feature in his effusion, but couldn't manage to make it rhyme comfortably with anything. He bethought himself, however, that it would only be a fair poetical

license to call it a rose. Then the flower-pot came in the way, for he was not at all sure that the name of such an article was adapted for the elevated style in which he meant to convey his sentiments. But some reflection enabled him to hit upon a more poetical expression for this humble article ; and, after much correcting and criticising, the following stanzas were brought to perfection, and were carefully copied out in violet ink on the back of the valentine :—

“No more, no more, ah ! never, never more
My heart will wander free and light as air ;
Nor shall I be as wretched as before,
Crushed down by cruel clouds of toil and care.
My struggles in the sea of grief are o’er,
The sun shines forth and all seems bright and fair,
One word has bound it with so sweet a chain,
And how I wish I heard that word again !

“A rose she gave me in a happy hour,
That grew beside her in a jar of mould ;
And thus she put me underneath her power,
For all my life until I do grow old.
The ocean may be dried up, darling flower,
The stars may set, the sun and moon wax cold,
But ne’er shall I that blissful time forget,
When our two hearts and hands together met !”

Phillips read this over till he had satisfied himself that it was the finest piece of the kind that had ever *not* been given to the public, and was in raptures when he thought what the effect of his verses would

be on the fair one to whom they were addressed. That there might be no mistake, that she might clearly understand whose was this genius which was thus laid at her feet, he wrote his initials in the corner of the envelope, and thought, as he did so, that some day when the Nowells of this world were forgot, his initials, written by his own hand, might be eagerly sought and purchased for half-a-crown, or even three-and-sixpence.

There was quite a heap of letters that night on the hall table of the Schoolhouse, from which a servant was wont to collect all documents intended for the post. But Phillips had no mind that his tender epistle should mingle among the vulgar herd of valentines; nor did he like the idea of inquisitive boys searching among the heap, and giggling and chaffing when they saw his writing on the envelope. So he repaired to the house-master, and asked leave to go out for a minute.

"Go out at this time of night!" said Mr Willoughby, rather astonished by such an unusual request. "Really, Phillips, unless for some very good reason, I cannot relax the rule of the house. Why do you wish to go out?"

Phillips glanced at the letter which he held in his hand, and smiled a little foolish smile as he saw Mr Willoughby smiling.

"Oh, I understand now! I forgot what day of the

month to-morrow was. Well, Phillips, you are a steady fellow, and I know I can trust you for this once, but remember, you mustn't ask again. Stop one moment. The door will be locked in five minutes, so be quick!"

"Very well, sir," said Phillips, flying off to get his cap, and in a minute was running up to the post-office at the corner of the Minster Green. It was a clear, fine night, after the rain, and the moon was shining so brightly that Phillips thought it was a great pity he had not put something about her into his verses. Few of your young poets can keep themselves from meddling with the moon. But to-night the moon only served Phillips by revealing to him the green-eyed monster which embitters the life of so many romantic lovers. He had posted his letter, and turned back to go home, when by the moonlight he saw a lady and a gentleman walking together on the Minster Green. He might never have noticed them, for Phillips' genius was one of those which look inside more than outside, but the lady's voice struck his ear, and made him start and turn round.

It was the voice of Rose—his Rose! They did not see him, for they seemed wrapped up in each other. Their faces were turned away from him, so he could not tell who the man was, but this he saw



The pair passed under the shadow of the Minster, and Phillips, in wrath and despair, turned to run home.—STORIES OF WHITMINSTER, p. 303.

plainly, that the ruffian had put his arm round her waist, and was whispering tenderly in her ear. Oh, horror! Then Rose's silvery laugh echoed back from the old walls—there could be no doubt! Phillips longed to run forward and beard his unknown rival on the spot, but he remembered Mr Willoughby's injunction, and hesitated. Then the pair passed under the shadow of the Minster, and Phillips, in wrath and despair, turned to run home.

Was it possible? Could it be? Had she pledged herself to another? Had he been deceived? Was this monster in a greatcoat and high hat her "dearest A.?" Who was this fiend who had the right of walking about the Minster Green at any hour of the day or night he pleased, and could carry out his fell designs, while the lady's true and faithful knight was safe under bolt and bar at the Schoolhouse? It was not to be borne! But to-morrow would come—at length! Then he would know the truth! Then he would bring this villain to account, and learn if his beloved had indeed played him false.

When Phillips came home in this ferocious humour, he found two small boys in his study amusing themselves with his razor, and was able somewhat to relieve his feelings by boxing their ears soundly, and kicking them out. But one of these small boys was brother

to a big boy, who presently arrived in wrath at the door of Phillips' study, which he had locked, and, on being refused admittance, battered and kicked and reviled and otherwise grievously vexed the soul of our poetic friend, who, when he was at length left in peace, settled with himself that he was a most unhappy and ill-used individual, that a blight was on his existence, that it would be nice for him to leave this wicked world, and so on. In this mood he sought comfort in the pages of his favourite poet for the time being, and found a dismal pleasure in such lines as—

“Fain would I fly the haunts of men,
I seek to shun, not hate, mankind ;
My breast requires the sullen glen,
Whose gloom may suit a darkened mind.”

“Ah! they don't understand me,” he said to himself, as he pulled off his shirt, and considered whether it might not be desirable to make interest with the matron for a clean one to wear to-morrow. “But some day they *shall* know.”

Then he got into bed, but couldn't fall asleep for a long time ; and when he did, his rest was broken by dreams of a duel with his rival, who turned out to be a “proud nobleman,” and was transfixed by Phillips' sword at the very first pass, but came to life again most unaccountably, and ran away with the

lady to a strong castle, guarded by policemen armed with enormous battle-axes, who refused admission to the postman coming round with valentines, and said that their mistress was not at home ;—from which one may be disposed to conclude that Phillips had been eating more than was proper for a lover ; and indeed I forgot to mention that he had been fain to solace his sorrows with a cocoa-nut, nearly half of which he had munched between the verses of Byron.

Next morning, Phillips was one of that great majority of the boys who were eagerly looking out for the postman ; but, as was to be expected, he soon shrank from mingling in the vulgar throng, and remained in his study, trying to persuade himself that he was reading Manfred, till a small boy, detailed for this duty, brought him one letter, and only one, addressed to "J. Alwyn Phillips, Esq."

A lady's handwriting! a laced border! It was what he expected. She was true after all. There must be some mistake. Now!

With fluttering heart and awkward fingers, Phillips tore open the envelope. But, confusion! What met his eyes? An enormous valentine of the cheap and nasty order, whereon was represented a ridiculous dandy, with a donkey's face, a white hat, a blue coat, green trousers striped with red, a gold-rimmed eye-

glass, a little cane, and an incipient moustache. This figure, as it complacently strutted along, somebody was supposed to be apostrophising in the following doggerel lines—

“ A silly, chattering, staring fop,
Who thinks he knows to please the lasses.
If you knew how they laugh at you,
You'd kick and bray like other asses.”

“ Some of Lessing's beastly nonsense,” exclaimed Phillips, almost crying with vexation and disappointment, as he tore the valentine into a thousand pieces.

So she was false after all. After leading him on to hope, after blasting his young affections, after poisoning her heart with perjury. She had been tempted by the gold of another! Let him have her, ha! ha! Let her go; she was unworthy of a noble heart! Let the world roll on its heartless course; he would scorn it all, and drown his sorrows in song. O woman! woman!

Here Phillips was about to consult Byron and other poets for some suitable reflections, but the breakfast bell rang, and he had to go downstairs, for was he not a SLAVE? It mattered not; let the iron enter into his soul, he would not feel it, so deep were the wounds that love had made in his heart.

One thing he resolved upon. He would seek an interview with her that very day. He would reproach

her with her perfidy ; he would give her one last chance of explanation. Then he would take a powerful and pathetic farewell of her—for ever ! So he got the clean shirt above hinted at, and attired himself with great care for this sacrifice of his hopes. He wished now that he hadn't sold his studs to Beesley, but he managed to borrow them for the day. Five minutes he spent in deciding whether he ought to wear his blue or his striped necktie, and five more in experimenting to see whether it looked better in a bow or in a knot, and finally decided to let it hang loose and untied, in sign of dejection and despair. Having settled this question, he damped his hair to make it curl. In his button-hole he stuck the bunch of crocuses she had given him. When she saw them, she would turn pale ; only the boys would laugh, that was the worst of it. Thus equipped, he went down to school, where, like so many other poets, he was obliged by the stern hand of Fate to perform dull daily tasks, which weighed—ah ! how heavily !—on his sentimental nature.

After twelve o'clock he would repair to her abode. She was always at home then. But boy and man cannot always dispose as they propose. Phillips was put on in a hard part of the Medea, more by token a part where the chorus inveighs against the dangers of love. His own exertions on Parnassus had left

him no time for the cultivation of these foreign and unfamiliar muses. He had not learned his lesson, not even from a crib. He stammered, guessed, failed, looked foolish, and at last subsided entirely.

"I am sorry, Phillips, very sorry," said Mr Nowell, gravely. "I had hoped you intended to take to heart what I said yesterday. Stay at twelve."

Phillips stayed at twelve, and listened to his sentence with gloomy looks.

"Get your dictionary, sit down, and write it all out correctly, remember. Do you understand me, Phillips?" he added, as our friend did not seem inclined to obey.

"Please, sir, may I have some other punishment?"

"Why?"

"I want particularly to go somewhere."

"Where?"

"I will write it out to-night. I will do better to-morrow."

Mr Nowell seemed to hesitate, but he said—

"No, I can't trust you. I have been too easy with you, Phillips. Stop and do it now, and then perhaps you will take care to learn your lesson another time. You are not to leave the room till it is finished."

With this Mr Nowell took up his umbrella, and

walked out of the schoolroom, leaving Phillips sitting sulkily at his desk, biting his pen to pieces, kicking the floor, and feeling very much disgusted.

"What a cold-blooded, brutal tyrant he is! And yet if he knew how I am tortured by miserable suspense, even his hard heart would relent. I cannot write this stuff. I will not. The door is not locked; he will never know. I will do it after dinner. I *must* go."

And the end of it was that Phillips took leave of the schoolroom, and slipped off to the Minster Green, choosing a roundabout way through back lanes and side streets, for fear of stumbling upon Mr Nowell, in which case the consequences would be decidedly unpleasant, not to say unpoetical.

He ran most of the way, but when he got near his destination, he stopped to grow cool and compose his attire and his feelings. As for what he intended to say, he had been rehearsing that to himself all school time, and he feared he should forget it if he waited a moment longer. So, after reconnoitring to see if the enemy was in sight, he made a dash across the Minster Green, and boldly assailed the door of the enchanted castle, where dwelt the false and fickle damsel for whom he sighed—in vain.

The door was opened, not by a dragon, but by a

small maid, new to her place and timid, who, in reply to his inquiry, replied dubiously—

“Yes, she is in the drawing-room—but”——

Phillips listened no further. He pushed his way into the drawing-room, and, when it was too late to draw back,—oh, horror, misery, and despair!—he saw Mrs Holmes on the sofa, and sitting beside her with his arm round her waist—Mr Nowell.

They were reading and laughing over a valentine—his valentine!

Phillips stood speechless, and Mr Nowell started up, crying—

“How is this, Phillips? Did I not tell you”——

“I—I—I—I,” stammered Phillips, and got no further.

“You have disobeyed me,” said Mr Nowell, in a much sharper tone than was usual with him. “Really I can’t pass over this. Go back to your work at once, and I will come presently and speak to you.”

“No, no,” cried the young widow. “Don’t punish him this time. Let me beg his pardon.”

“I should like to pass it over, and, for your sake, my darling, I wish I could do it, but this is a serious breach of discipline, and”——

“Dearest Arthur,” she said, hanging on his arm, “the first favour I have ever asked of you! Surely

you won't refuse me. I will undertake that Alwyn doesn't abuse your kindness."

Phillips never knew how he got out of that room. But he did get out, and survived to begin a poem on the subject of this great misfortune of his life.

"The course of true love never did run smooth :
I found a wild gazelle to sigh and soothe
My spirit's strife ;
But when I fain had plucked this tender flower,
A tyrant came and tore her from her bower—
Ah ! such is life.

"I pass my dismal days in tiresome toil,
And all the night my heavy heart doth boil
With anguish rife !
Ah ! would my fevered brow at length grow cold,
Ah ! would at length I slept beneath the mould—
For such is life !

"Yes, tyrant, know this manly heart is bold
Against the horrors of thy donjon hold,
And axe and knife !
Yes, perjured damsel, let him do his worst,
Since all my joy by thee hath been accurst—
And such is life."

But this poem was not finished, for before Phillips had found another suitable rhyme to *life*, a gleam of hope was cast upon his own, and he fell in love again, this time with the young lady behind the counter, at Mr Baynes, the confectioner's. Such, again, is life.

Mr and Mrs Nowell were married at Easter, and Phillips made up his mind to suffer all sorts of injuries

from the spite and jealousy of his successful rival. But both the happy couple seemed very friendly and unsuspecting towards him, and actually asked him to tea. To tea indeed! About this period he is supposed to have written the impassioned verses addressed to "Medea," and beginning—

"The festive feast I cannot grace,
The banquet board I shun ;
For there I must behold the face
Of Her—the Faithless One !

"There is a poison in those sweets,
The cup is crowned with care ;
And bitterly my heart-blood beats
To music of Despair !"

But after all, Phillips did go to tea more than once. And Mrs Nowell made very nice cakes and strawberry jam, and Mr Nowell talked to him very kindly and sensibly, and persuaded him to pay more attention to the works of Horace and Euripides, and less to those of Byron and J. Alwyn Phillips. But he added another verse to one of his poems—

"A blessed balm my wounded heart is healing,
And I can see her with less painful feeling
Another's wife !
Afflictions unto all on earth must come,
And we must bear them bravely and be dumb,
Such—such is life !"

1759 5

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